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A Study of Narrative, Style, and Themes in the Correspondence of Moroccan and Tunisian Male Writers (Early 20th Century)

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Abstract

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Den här avhandlingen analyserar en korpus av publicerade personliga brev från första halvan av 1900-talet skrivna av manliga författare från Marocko och Tunisien. Studiens övergripande syfte är att undersöka och identifiera de publicerade brevens litterära egenskaper (*genius*) och estetiska autonomi (egenvärde) med hjälp av en narratologisk och stilistisk metod som fokuserar på intertextualitet och brevtexternas narratologiska nivåer (berättarteknik och berättelsevärld).

Studiens brevkorpus, vars tidsperiod sträcker sig från år 1929 till 1945, har skapats från två verk: *al-Illighiyyāt* ('Skrifter från Illigh') (1963) av den marockanska författaren Muḥammad al-Mukhtār al-Sūsī och *Rasāʾil al-Shābbī* ('al-Shābbīs brev') (1966) av den tunisiska författaren Muḥammad al-Ḥulaywī. Modern brevkonst är ett understuderat område i modern arabisk litteraturforskning. Såväl studiens maghribinska material som studiens litteraturvetenskapliga ingång till detta material utgör ett nytt bidrag till forskningen om modern arabisk litteratur.

Analysen utgår från ett textcentrerat perspektiv för att kunna framkalla brevtexternas fulla potential av mångfaldiga litterära egenskaper och teman. Analysen tillämpar även ett genusperspektiv som ämnar bidra med nyanserade och divergerande bilder av manlighet och manlig homosocialitet till det begynnande fältet av maskulinitetsforskning inom arabisk litteratur.

Avhandlingen är uppdelad i tre delar. I den första delen behandlas det arabiska brevets bakgrund och historia – såväl förmodern som modern – samt dess formella

poetik. I den andra delen presenteras och diskuteras studiens primärmaterial liksom urvalsprocessen för detta material samt analysens teoretiska ramverk och metod. Avhandlingens tredje del presenterar analysen av studiens brevkorpus, vilken inleds med en utförligare introduktion till brevskrivarna i deras historiska kontext. Avhandlingen avslutas med en diskussion av studiens resultat och en sammanfattning.

Studien visar hur brevtexternas litterära kvalitéer och estetiska autonomi kan bestyrkas och erfaras genom deras världskapande material (berättelsevärldar) och kreativa approprieringar av inhemska och icke-inhemska litterära traditioner och konventioner. Studien visar också på dynamiska och mångsidiga bilder av maskulinitet och manlig vänskap och känslosamhet som utmanar kulturella och rasifierade kategorier av manlighet och monolitiska narrativ därom.

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Note on Romanization and Translation

Romanization of Arabic is in accordance with the general praxis that exists within English literary studies on Arabic literature[1] and with the style guide of Library of Congress.[2] See table below.

The definite article (always lowercase) will not be assimilated to sun consonants and will therefore be romanized as *al-*, with the exception of its appearance in poetry, rhymned prose (*saj ʿ*), and Quranic verses, in which case the phonetically correct *ash-*, *ad-*, *at-*, etc., are used. Neither will consideration be given to *hamzat al-waṣl* (*-l-* as opposed to *al-*), except in the cases of the exceptions mentioned immediately above and when the preposition *li-* is followed by the definite article (*lil-walad* as opposed to *li-al-walad*). Initial *hamza* (ʾ) is also dropped (*ibn* as opposed to *ʾibn*). The *alif maqṣūrah* (ىٔ) used to represent the long vowel *ā* is romanized *á*. Moreover, the romanization of Arabic is generally made with word-final pauses, meaning that word-final short vowels (*-u*, *-a*, *-i*) are in principal omitted unless they are found in poetry, Quranic verse, rhymned prose, or else where they facilitate grammatical understanding (e.g. final inflections of verbs, prepositions, and pronouns [incl. pronominal suffixes]). Word-final vowels are also dropped in pause and if they are deemed superfluous (e.g. titles and single words).

All translations are my own unless otherwise stated, in which case proper references will be provided. It should be noted that I do not claim my own translations of literary texts to have a literary quality themselves. However, I have aimed for a degree of idiomacy when that is deemed necessary to facilitate the understanding and overall flow of the English text. I also often utilize fillers in the form of brackets for clarifications and explanatory purposes.

A special note ought to be made with regard to the original Arabic texts. I have tried to stay as faithful as possible to the original Arabic texts as they appear in their edited, published editions. This means that I avoid correcting spelling errors or interfering with the orthography and punctuation system when quoting the

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[1] Isaksson (2010: 4-9).
[2] The style guide of Library of Congress was retrieved on 2022-02-09. (https://www.loc.gov/catdir/cpso/romanization/arabic.pdf).

Arabic texts, even if they appear strange or unconventional to the Arabic speaking reader. I believe that such amendments, where they have critical implications, lie outside the purpose of the current study. However, I do occasionally mark spelling errors with the marker "Sic." Moreover, my interpretation of the original Arabic text in all of the above aspects (including the punctuation system) is conveyed in the English translation. In the case of ambiguity, footnotes are provided with alternative interpretations of the meaning of the Arabic text.

ARA.	LOC	ARA.	LOC
ء	ʾ	غ	gh
ب	b	ف	f
ت	t	ق	q
ث	th	ك	k
ج	j	ل	l
ح	ḥ	م	m
خ	kh	ن	n
د	d	ﻩ	h
ذ	dh	و	w
ر	r	ي	y
ز	z		
س	s		
ش	sh	◌َ	a
ص	ṣ	ا	ā
ض	ḍ	◌ُ	u
ط	ṭ	و	ū
ظ	ẓ	◌ِ	i
ع	ʿ	ي	ī

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The completion of this dissertation would not have been possible without the help and support of several people. I would first like to express my sincere gratitude to my main supervisor Tetz Rooke, Professor in Arabic at the University of Gothenburg, for his professional and friendly guidance and support throughout the whole of my doctoral studies and through the process of formulating, writing, and completing this study. I would also like to express my sincere gratitude to my assistant supervisor Tania Al Saadi, Associate Professor in Arabic at Stockholm University, for her minute reading of every draft that I have sent to her and for her invaluable feedback and support, which have helped me during the process of writing and improving this dissertation.

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personal pictures of the correspondents Ibrāhīm ibn Aḥmad and Aḥmad al-Manjrah.

1. Introduction

This study takes the relatively nascent and small field of the literary study of published "real" letters and letter collections as its starting point. Essentially, the study seeks to voice a reading of modern Arabic letter texts from a literary perspective, in contrast to the ethnographic, historical, or sociological readings to which letters – regardless of their geographical origin – have generally been subjugated. While letters of modern Arabic speaking writers have been published and put out into the book market, a study that engages with such works from a literary perspective of the kind that I am adopting is, to the best of my knowledge, unprecedented.

The study's overarching hypothesis is that letters have the capacity for an aesthetic autonomy and an expression of some kind of literary genius, which can be tested and verified by a text-centered narratological and stylistic analysis. "Aesthetic autonomy" refers to the ability of the letter texts to stand alone as self-contained aesthetic objects in relation to their historical, extra-textual context, while "literary genius" refers to the embedded literary elements and qualities of the letter texts.

I use the terms "aesthetic autonomy" and "literary genius" as heuristic devices, that is, as abstractions or conceptual tools by means of which one can approach and scrutinize complex cultural or social realities and generate new knowledge about a phenomenon.[3] The use of heuristic devices is also helpful when creating hypotheses. These two concepts are not value-laden and do not suggest "a standard of perfection or an ultimate goal."[4] As heuristic devices, the conceptions of "aesthetic autonomy" and "literary genius" are open to both deviation and

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[3] This is similar to the term "ideal type" that is associated with Max Weber and that refers to a mental model or construct (abstraction) that seeks to capture central elements of a phenomenon and "offers guidance to the construction of hypotheses" (Weber, in Adams and Sydie [2001: 176]). Weber himself did not invent the practice or method of ideal types; he rather labeled and described what social scientists (and others) already were (and are) doing. Take as an example the ideal typical conception about "bureaucracy" that guides the social scientist in their analysis of administrative forms in a given social or historical reality without them having to resort to universal or totalistic truth claims. This example of bureaucracy as an ideal type is found in Adams and Sydie (2001: 176).

[4] Adams and Sydie (2001: 176).

compliance in the sense that they are not in themselves descriptions of reality, but aim "to give unambiguous means of expression to such a description."[5]

In this regard, it is also interesting to note the original meaning of the word *genius* (Lat. *genius*, lit. 'that which is [just] born') as a reference to an inborn (indwelling) spirit and as a derivation from the Greek word *gignesthai* ('to be born; to become'). Essentially, genius may be defined as "the entirety of the traits" united in a begotten or created being or thing and can be attributed to animate and inanimate things alike (including systems and institutions) to describe its nature, character, or disposition.[6] In a similar fashion, the concept of autonomy (from Gr. *autonomíā* 'independence') is not a mirror image of a total absence of causal dependency or external constraints.[7] Therefore, one may attribute autonomy to an artistic or aesthetic object in both an explanatory (heteronomist) and a justificatory (autonomist) sense. Such a conception of the term saves us from pledging allegiance to any exclusivist or dogmatic heteronomist or autonomist point of view when studying artistic or aesthetic objects and expressions.

While not discarding published "real" letters as pure lies or fantasy, a literary approach to these kinds of texts, often written by writers and artists, recognizes that they often are as literary – and perhaps as much fictional constructs – as their fictive counterparts.[8] Thus, a literary study of the published letter or letter collection shows how the value and function of letters exceeds that of mere documentation and biographical information about the parties involved and their historical contexts. Instead, studies such as the current one examines the ways in which letters rather construct and transform worlds and subjective realities, than represents a factual and historical extra-textual world and reality. Consequently, the literary interest in letters challenges the common restriction of the value and use of letters to concerning only the fields of history and sociology.

While there has been a modest amount of previous research that adopts this kind of literary approach to and theorization of published letters and letter collections, such research has more or less exclusively dealt with letters in a Western context.[9] Therefore, it is my hope, with this study, to explore and demonstrate what such a perspective may yield when applied to published modern

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[5] Weber, in Adams and Sydie (2001: 176).

[6] For these definitions and more examples of *genius*, see Kelly (1998: keyword: "genius") and Hornblower (2012: keyword: "genius").

[7] Kelly (1998: keyword: "autonomy") and Hornblower (2012: keyword: "autonomy").

[8] MacArthur (1990: 118).

[9] E.g. MacArthur (1990), Jolly and Stanley (2005), Stanley and Dampier (2008). For more on the state of the art, see § 1.2.1.

Arabic letters. Hence, I anticipate that the current study will be an exploratory and illustrative contribution to the introduction of the literary study of modern Arabic letter writing within the field of Arabic literature.

For this purpose, I have gathered a corpus consisting of published private letters written by Moroccan and Tunisian male writers from the first half of the 20th century. The letters were sampled from two works: *al-Illighiyyāt* ('Writings from Illigh') by the Moroccan writer and scholar Muḥammad al-Mukhtār al-Sūsī (d. 1383/1963), and *Rasāʾil al-Shābbī* ('al-Shābbī's Letters') by the Tunisian writer Muḥammad al-Ḥulaywī (d. 1398/1978).[10] While the writers of the sampled letters are known, to varying degrees, within and outside the Arab world and in academia, the literary study of their private letters and correspondence has, to my knowledge, not been done before.

All of the above is a part of my larger objective as a researcher to introduce and explore lesser known authorships and literary productions and innovative qualitative ways of reading and studying texts within the research field of Arabic literature.

1.1 Aim

The primary aim of this study is to present a comprehensive literary analysis of a corpus consisting of early 20th century private letters written by a selection of male writers from Morocco and Tunisia. Through a text-centered literary approach, the study seeks to identify textual properties, on both formal and semantic levels, that could support the hypothesis that the sampled letter texts have the capacity for an aesthetic autonomy and an expression of a literary genius. In essence, what is at stake is the letters' ontological status as literary and aesthetic objects, as opposed to or in addition to historical and documentary ones, and what the make-up of that status inductively looks like on different levels of the letter texts.

The study seeks to engage with the letter texts with the help of a set of working questions (see below and § 5.4). I have intentionally allowed these working questions to be quite open and broad. This is motivated in order to give room for the potential variety of literary properties and themes that may be induced through a text-centered literary approach to the letter texts. Furthermore, the current state of the art within the research area calls for the texts to unfold and generate

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[10] These two works are presented in depth under "Primary Material" (§ 4); for more thorough biographical information on the authors of these works and their correspondents, see "Introduction" (§ 6) in *Part III*.

analytical material, within some theoretical and methodological parameters, as freely as possible.

Working Questions
- How do the letters produce stories?;
- How does narrative organization, style, and vocabulary affect story making?
- What kind of story worlds and characters do the letters construct?
- How are events and subjective sentiments reproduced and transformed in the epistolary written text*?*
- How do such properties inform the discursive images of masculinity and homosociality?

1.2 Motivation

I have already hinted at my larger objective as a researcher of introducing and exploring lesser known authorships and literary productions, and innovative qualitative ways of reading and studying texts within the research field of Arabic literature. The motivation for conducting a literary study of a sampling of private letters written by male writers from Morocco and Tunisia undoubtedly ties into this larger objective and may be divided into two key motivators, namely, the state of the art and the material.

1.2.1 State of the Art

To the best of my knowledge, there exists no directly related previous research prior to the current study. Despite the fact that letters and letter collections of modern Arabic speaking writers have been published,[11] I have not been able to find

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[11] For example, *al-Shuʿlah al-zarqāʾ* ('The Blue Flame') (1984), containing the letters of Khalīl Jibrān to Mayy Ziyādah, and *Zahrat al-ʿumr* ('Flower of Life') (first published 1943) by Tawfīq al-Ḥakīm, in which the author has collected the letters he sent to his friend in Paris. One may also refer to the letter collection of the Iraqi poet Maʿrūf al-Ruṣāfī's (d. 1365/1945), *Rasāʾil al-Ruṣāfī* ('al-Ruṣāfī's Letters') (1994), edited by ʿAbd al-Ḥamīd al-Rashūdī, as well as the letters of the Palestinian author Ghassān Kanafānī (d. 1392/1972) to the Syrian author and journalist Ghādah al-Sammān (Kanafānī, 2013 [1999]) and the correspondence between Maḥmūd Darwīsh (d. 2008) and Samīḥ al-Qāsim (d. 2014) (Darwīsh and al-Qāsim [1990]), of which excerpts were published in the *Anthology of Arabic Literature, Culture, and Thought from Pre-Islamic Times to the Present* (2005: 176-195), by Bassam K. Frangieh, under the chapter heading of "Letters." Modern Moroccan examples of published letter collections are *Ward wa-ramād* ('Roses and Ashes') (2006), which contains the correspondence (1975-1994) between the authors Muḥammad Shukrī (d.

any previous research that has dealt with modern private letters in Arabic from a literary perspective similar to the one that is explored in this study. This means that there is no existing theorization of the modern Arabic letter in terms of its literary genius (or "literariness") or its autonomy as a self-contained aesthetic object in relation to an extra-textual historical context.[12] To a certain extent, this is also true with regard to research within the field of Western literature. Only a few case studies touch upon the literary and aesthetic properties of modern letter writing (fictional and non-fictional) within a Western context.[13] Yet such research is still very much grounded in a historical-biographical tradition, in which the study object (the letters) acts as a bridge between the reader and the life of the author and the age they lived in. However, although perhaps engaged by relatively few literary scholars, existing theorizations of Western letters and correspondences (including epistolary fiction) could support a more text-centered and literary treatment of this kind of material.

The previous research that has been most influential to the current study and its text-centered literary approach is the theoretical work within the field of life writing[14] by Liz Stanley, Helen Dampier, Andrea Salter, and Margaretta Jolly,[15] who in some cases have worked in collaboration. The works on epistolary fiction by Elizabeth Jane MacArthur, and Janet Gurkin Altman[16] have also been important in supporting and formulating the theoretical framework of this study[17] and its approach to the sampled letter texts.

While the theory and methods of the study will be presented and discussed in the designated chapter (§ 5), the work by above-mentioned researchers suggests that the (published) letter or letter collection is a particular kind of creative creation. Moreover, letters, as we find them in published edited works, have an artificiality to them in the sense that they are not mimetic reflections of the ur-letter(s) (the original letter[s]) nor of the historical writing situation. This means

1424/2003) and Muḥammad Barrādah (b. 1938), and *Rasāʾil al-sijn* ('Prison Letters') (al-Idrīsī [ed.] [2021]), which contains the letters that the author ʿAbd al-Qādir al-Shāwī (b. 1950) wrote to the author Khanātah Bannūnah (b. 1940).

12 For the modern Arabic letter as a social enterprise, see Khaldi (2009; 2017).

13 E.g. Beebee (2007), Romani (2008), Stanley and Dampier (2008), Hensbergen (2011), Stanley, Salter, and Dampier (2012), and Ngom (2018).

14 Life writing refers to the subject field of written texts that takes a life as its subject and which can be biographical, historical, novelistic, or self-referential (auto-biographical). This definition of life writing is found in Smith and Watson (2010: 4).

15 E.g. Stanley (2004), Jolly and Stanley (2005), Beebee (2007), Stanley and Dampier (2008), Jolly (2008), Stanley (2011), Stanley, Salter, and Dampier (2012).

16 Altman (1982) and MacArthur (2009).

17 The theoretical framework and method of analysis is discussed in depth in § 5.

that the published letter has a different ontological status than the ur-letter.[18] However, across the board, I have found that there is a lack of research on the formal (or generic) and semantic properties of modern private letters that could further inform and substantiate their ontological status as literary and aesthetic objects.

With regard to research on Arabic letter writing, it is similar to the research on Western letter writing in being very historically and biographically oriented. As a subject of history, we find key works, such as *The culture of letter-writing in pre-modern Islamic society* (2008) by Adrian Gully and *Documentary Arabic Letters on Papyrus: Form and Function* (2010) by Eva Mira Grob; the articles by Geoffrey Khan and Klaus U. Hachmeier deal with Arabic epistolography from early Islamic times to the 11th century.[19] In Arabic, we find works on history and historical poetics, such as *al-Tarassul al-adabī bi-al-maghrib: al-naṣṣ wa-al-khiṭāb* ('Literary Letter Writing in the Maghreb: Text and Discourse') (2003) by Āminah al-Dahrī and *al-Rasāʾil al-fanniyyah fī al-ʿaṣr al-islāmī ilá nihāyat al-ʿaṣr al-umawī* ('Artistic Letters from Early Islamic Times to the End of the Umayyad Period') (2013) by Ghānim Jawād Riḍā. As regards modern Arabic letter writing, on which practically no substantial research exists, the articles by Boutheina Khaldi that deal with letter writing as a social enterprise during the early 20th century have been an important reference.[20]

Drawing on this previous research on Arabic letter writing, together with original epistolographical work in Arabic, I have been able to present a historical backdrop to the subject matter and an outline of the formal poetics of the Arabic letter in both the pre-modern and modern period.[21] Moreover, the previous research on Arabic letter writing has been important not only in order to connect the primary material of the current study to a historical context and tradition, but also, when possible, to indicate continuities within the Arabic epistolographic tradition in conventional and literary forms.

Given the current state of the art, the basis of the current study is primarily theoretical and is driven by a hypothesis that the sampled modern private letters in Arabic have the capacity for an expression of a literary genius and an aesthetic autonomy. However, despite its exploratory nature, one could connect the study to

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[18] Stanley (2004: 137, 141).
[19] See Hachmeier (2002a; 2002b) and Khan (2008).
[20] Khaldi (2009; 2017).
[21] See "A Historical Perspective on the Arabic Letter" (§ 2) and "A Formal Poetics of the Arabic Letter" (§ 3).

other work and projects, both on-going and completed, within and outside the field of Arabic literature, such as "Literature, Cognition and Emotions" (LCE) (University of Oslo), "Centre for Critical Heritage Studies" (CCHS) (University of Gothenburg and University College London), and the "Global Sentimentality Project" (University of Erlangen-Nuremberg). Additionally, two published works of relevance are *Civilising Emotions* (2015) by Margit Pernau et al. and *Trials of Modernity* (2013) by Tarik El-Ariss. These projects pose and investigate a range of questions and issues pertaining to, amongst other things, cross-cultural and cross-linguistic representations of emotions and sentiments, cultural memory and identity, and the history of emotions. Thus, the study may be read in the light of this interest in examining and reassessing literary representations of emotions, sentiments, and the self and the other.

1.2.2 The Material

The primary material from which the letter-corpus has been sampled is interesting to study for several reasons. First, I have found no previous research that in-depth examines *al-Illighiyyāt* by al-Sūsī and *Rasāʾil al-Shābbī* by al-Ḥulaywī from a literary perspective. This is certainly the case with the sampled correspondence. While previous research and other written material exists on the Tunisian letter writers al-Ḥulaywī, Abū al-Qāsim al-Shābbī (d. 1353/1934), and Muḥammad al-Bashrūsh (d. 1363/1944), such research has a primarily biographical/biblio-graphical and literary historical focus.[22] The same can be said with regard to the Moroccan letter writers al-Sūsī, Ibrāhīm ibn Aḥmad (d. 1411/1990), Aḥmad al-Manjrah (d. 1423/2002), and Shaykh al-Ṭāhir ibn Muḥammad al-Īfrānī (d. 1374/1955).[23]

Moreover, the letter writers differ in recognition both outside and inside the Arabic speaking world and hence, with the possible exception of al-Shābbī, they are probably new authors to many readers, academics and non-academics alike. A study that juxtaposes *al-Illighiyyāt* and *Rasāʾil al-Shābbī* and the selected letter writers is also unprecedented.

As a result of using lesser studied, and perhaps lesser known, sources for the purpose of this literary study on Arabic modern private letters, I also hope to bring in the perspectives of marginalized or peripheral texts and contribute to the

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[22] E.g. Karrū (1953; 1961; 1999), Kabā (1997), Ostle (1997) (al-Shābbī), Dāwud (2003) (al-Bashrūsh), al-Jazzār (2012) (al-Ḥulaywī).

[23] E.g. al-Hāṭī (n.d.) (al-Īfrānī), Carbonell (1995), Boukous (1999), El-Adnani (2007) (al-Sūsī), al-Marʿashlī (2006: keyword: "al-Ṭāhir ibn Muḥammad al-Manjrah").

decentralization of Arabic literary studies from the Eastern part of the Arab-Islamic world (the Mashriq) by augmenting the field with Maghribine texts.

1.3 Overview

This dissertation is divided into *Part I: Background, Part II: Method*, and *Part III: Analysis*. *Part I* constitutes the backdrop that aims to introduce the reader to a brief historical background on the Arabic word *risālah* ('letter') and its synonyms, and to letter writing as an enterprise within a pre-modern and early modern context. *Part I* also contains an outline of the formal poetics of the pre-modern and modern Arabic letter. In *Part II*, the primary material and theoretical framework and method of the study, together with its working questions, are presented and discussed. *Part III* begins with a biographical introduction to the letter writers of the sampled correspondence and then proceeds to the primary analysis of the letter-corpus. I will be exploring topics of narrative, language (style), thematics, and intertextuality as they appear in the sampled letter texts, such as literary and generic conventions, masculinity, characterization, and illness narratives.[24] The analysis is followed by a concluding discussion in relation to the results yielded by the analysis.

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[24] See, for example, "The Setting, the Action, the Writer, and the Writing" (§ 7.1.1), "Masculine Performances and Self-Making" (§ 7.1.4 and § 7.2.7), "Dialogs and the Illusion of Mimesis" (§ 7.1.2), "Characters' Dynamics: Mythicizing Discourse" (§ 7.2.1), and "Stories of the Body: Illness and Physical Health" (§ 7.2.5).

PART I: BACKGROUND

2. A Historical Perspective on the Arabic Letter

This chapter aims to present a brief historical background to the Arabic letter as both a term and a social enterprise in a pre-modern and modern context. The chapter opens up with a discussion of the meaning(s) of the word *risālah* and its development and synonyms (§ 2.1) before moving on to the discussion of Arabic letter writing as a historical phenomenon from ca. 750 to the early 20th century (§ 2.2).

2.1 The Word *Risālah* and its Development and Synonyms

The root *r-s-l*, from which the word *risālah* (pl. *rasāʾil*) is derived, carries many meanings which have been thoroughly explored within the Arabic lexicographical tradition. But, as Ghānim Jawād Riḍā suggests,[25] one may reasonably consult the definition transmitted in the dictionary of Muḥammad ibn Yaʿqūb al-Fīrūzābādī (d. 817/1415) that reads "*[al-]Rasal* […] : denotes a 'herd' or 'flock' of anything, and its plural is '*arsāl[un]*'"; a herd like that of camels or sheep."[26] Added to this, we find the saying: "They sent out (*arsalū*) their camels to the watering place in herds (*irsālan*)" (*arsalū ibilahum ilá al-māʾ irsālan [ay qiṭaʿan]*),[27] which further accentuates the meaning of 'mission,' and in extension, 'missive,' 'message,' and 'envoy.'[28] According to Arazi and Ben-Shammay,[29] the word *risālah* originally signified an orally transmitted message, and its linkage to the spoken [message] remained strong throughout the pre-Islamic and early Islamic periods – up to and including the Umayyad period. That is not to say that the Arab culture of pre-Islamic and early Islamic times was completely devoid of any practice of writing and scripture, but rather that the culture has been described as a predominantly oral one, or one in which orality and aurality took precedence over

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25 Riḍā (2013: 13).
26 al-Fīrūzābādī (1998: keyword: "al-rasal").
27 Refer to *Lisān al-ʿarab* of Ibn Manẓūr (1955: keyword: "r-s-l"). This example was also used by Riḍā (2013: 13).
28 Cf. Bearman et al. (2012: keyword: "risāla").
29 In Bearman et al. (2012: keyword: "risāla"). Cf. Riḍā (2013: 15).

written literacy. The general limited availability and spread of the written word are likewise likely to have been contributing and decisive factors for the letter's strong connection to orality (and aurality).[30]

Over the course of history, several synonymous words for *risālah* in the sense of 'missive; letter,' whether oral or written, have been used. In *Bahjat al-majālis wa-uns al-mujālis* ('The Joy of Concourse and the Pleasure of Company') by Ibn ʿAbd al-Barr (d. 463/1071), we find the utterance of Ibn al-Anbārī (d. 328/869) that the terms *rasūl*, *rasīl*, and *risālah* share the same meaning (*sawāʾ*, lit. '[are] equal; same'),[31] that is, that of 'missive; letter.' The usage of *rasūl* – which commonly signifies 'messenger' – in the sense of 'missive; letter' is found, for example, in the following verse by Kuthayyir ʿAzzah (d. 105/723): "The slanderers are liars, for I have not confided in them any secret nor have I sent them any letter (*rasūl*)" (*laqad kadhaba l-wāshūna mā buḥtu ʿindahum bi-sirrin, wa-lā arsaltuhum bi-rasūl*).[32] Other synonymous words for 'letter' are *alūkah* (also *alūk*, *maʾlukah*, and *maʾluk*), denoting an oral message, *kitāb* (pl. *kutub*), *mukātabah* (pl. *mukātabāt*), and *ruqʿah* (pl. *riqāʿ* [modern usage: *ruqaʿ*]).[33] As noted by Gully, the term *maktūb* (pl. *maktūbāt*) was generally not used; however, it appears more frequently in the modern period.[34]

2.2 A Brief Background to Arabic Letter Writing as an Enterprise

2.2.1 Pre-Modernity (ca. 750-1500CE)

Correspondence or letter writing, *tarassul*, became an integral part of what is known as the science or tradition of *inshāʾ*, which can be traced back to the end of the Umayyad period (r. 661-750).[35] The term *inshāʾ* strictly means 'composition' or 'construction,' and was primarily used to refer to official ("state") documents, diplomatic papers, (private and official) letters, and later, various style manuals (including letter manuals). However, the term *inshāʾ* has also been understood

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[30] For a thorough study on the history of reading and processes of textualization in the pre-modern Arab world, see Hirschler (2012). For literacy in pre-Islamic times, see also Riḍā (2013: 27-31).

[31] See Ibn ʿAbd al-Barr (1981: 277).

[32] Another variant reads "*bi-rasīl*" instead of "*bi-rasūl*" and "*bi-laylá*" instead of "*bi-sirrin*". See Ibn ʿAbd al-Barr (1981: 277).

[33] See Gully (2008: 1-2); Bearman et al. (2012: keyword: "risāla"); Riḍā (2013: 13-25).

[34] Gully (2008: 2).

[35] Bearman et al. (2012: keyword: "inshāʾ").

more broadly as "the act of creating something [original] without following a model,"[36] in the words of the Egyptian scholar and chancery clerk in the Mamluk administration, Abū al-ʿAbbās Aḥmad al-Qalqashandī (d. 821/1418). When it comes to pre-modern letter writing as a genre, there exist two main categories: private or personal letters, known as *rasāʾil ikhwāniyyah* or *ikhwāniyyāt*[37] (lit. 'brotherly letters'),[38] and official letters, known as *rasāʾil dīwāniyyah* ('administrative/chancery letters').[39]

The exact origin of the *inshāʾ* tradition and its developmental phases is not yet established. However, the probable answer is that its forerunners and influencers existed in the diplomatic and commercial documents that were utilized during the time of the Prophet Muḥammad in Mecca, as well as in Persian and Byzantine documentary and chancery traditions.[40] Moreover, it is not yet certain when the term *inshāʾ* first came into use, but its practice as a craft – in terms of creating (model) letters and manuals – is widely attributed to the well-known chief secretary of Marwān II (r. 744-749),[41] ʿAbd al-Ḥamīd ibn Yaḥyá (d. *ca*. 132/750). Within the Arabic epistolographic tradition, ʿAbd al-Ḥamīd ibn Yaḥyá acts as a central figure who marked the heightening status of the secretary, known as the *kātib* (lit. 'writer').[42]

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[36] Quoted in Gully (2008: 15).

[37] NB: Hachmeier (2002b: 141-142) and Gully (2008: 14) differentiates between what are labeled as 'private letters' and what are known as *ikhwāniyyāt*. The former, according to Hachmeier, deal with serious "real life" matters and are not centered on the theme and literary treatment of friendship, which according to Hachmeier is a distinctive feature of *ikhwāniyyāt*. However, Arazi and Ben Shammay (Bearman et al. [2012: keyword: "risāla"]) uses the term *ikhwāniyyāt* as an encompassing generic category for private or unofficial letters. Here, I adopt the view of Arazi and Ben Shammay. I believe that this view is more practical in a situation where an agreed-upon taxonomy does not exist (historically and currently) and I am also doubtful that such a clear distinction between "real" private letters and literary ones existed within a pre-modern context (cf. Greek and Roman "real" and literary private letters) (Hachmeier, 2002b: 143).

[38] Indeed, the title of this study is a wordplay on the English meaning of the word *al-ikhwāniyyāt*. However, this is not to suggest or argue for a diachrony with respect to the *ikhwāniyyāt*-genre and its entrance into the modern era, which is a topic that this study does not delve into and which would require a formal comparative study.

[39] Bearman et al. (2012: keyword: "risāla").

[40] Bearman et al. (2012: keyword: "inshāʾ").

[41] ʿAbd al-Ḥamīd al-Kātib was assigned this position in the year 114/732, during Marwān II's governance of Armenia and Adharbayjān. He remained at Marwān II's service during his whole reign as Caliph up until his death in the year 132/750, after which ʿAbd al-Ḥamīd al-Kātib was soon assassinated at the hands of the Abbasids.

[42] Gully (2008: 12) and Bearman et al. (2012: keyword: "inshāʾ").

The term *kātib* (pl. *kuttāb*), in this context, is an umbrella term for all the civil servants – regardless of rank – who provided governmental services within the chancery (*dīwān [al-rasāʾil/al-mukātabah]*). Thus, *kātib* refers to clerks, secretaries, and directors of all positions up to and including the highest one, the chief secretary, who worked within the governmental administration that was responsible for producing letters and documents on the government's behalf.[43] While it seems that the government closely surveyed this apparatus in most cases, it is important to note that the written documents that the secretaries produced often travelled outside of the governmental institutions, which undeniably poses the question of whether such documents were written with a larger public in mind, as argued by Shawkat M. Toorawa:

> Letters were composed for a wider readership, circulating beyond the (two) correspondents. Indeed, the letter and epistle in Arabic, as in many other literary traditions, became a literary form and conceit through which one could instruct, inform, announce, and criticize.[44]

This also indicates that a generally effective postal service (*barīd*) was put into place. Although a well-known and used state apparatus already during pre-Umayyad times, the official postal service became one of the most important institutions operated by the government from the beginning of the Abbasid period (r. 762-1258).[45] Although the postal service suffered from some disorganization and difficulties during the Buyid (r. 934-1062) and Seljuk (r. 1037-1194) dynasties, it was later recovered by the Mamluks (r. 1250-1517).[46]

In relation to the circulation of official documents in other (cultural) spheres of society, Muhsin J. Al-Musawi and H. R. Roemer speak of the chancery's influential cultural capital. Al-Musawi and Roemer indicates that the chancery played a major role in the institutionalization or codification and centralization of the prosaic literary enterprise, which affected the style and conventions of later Arabic prose.[47]

Moreover, the image of the secretaries is a contested one and it appears that there existed conflicts (of interest) between these civil servants and other important groups within society, most significantly intellectual elites and religious scholars

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[43] Toorawa (2005: 59-60).
[44] Toorawa (2005: 60).
[45] Bearman et al. (2012: keyword: "barīd").
[46] For more on the practicalities of the official postal service, see Bearman et al. (2012: keyword: "barīd").
[47] In Bearman et al. (2012: keyword: "inshāʾ") and Al-Musawi (2015: 177, 218).

(ʿulamāʾ), at least up until the 10th century.[48] Outsiders accused the secretaries of bad character and corruption, which included favoritism and bribes to upgrade their administrative rank. I believe that the reasons behind these contentions most likely had to do with the secretaries' apparently favorable position in relation to the ruling power and their material and cultural capital, rather than to some kind of morality based ethos.

This marks the end of the brief historical background regarding letter writing, *tarassul*, as an enterprise in the pre-modern Arab-Islamic world. Below, where the formal poetics of the Arabic letter is discussed, relevant historical remarks will continue to be made, including comments on what happened to the *inshāʾ* tradition after the 16th century, that is, during the Ottoman period and up until modernity.

2.2.2 The *Nahḍah* Period (Mid-19th Century-Early 20th Century)

As with the case of the preceding Ottoman period, there does not exist a substantial amount of previous research about letter writing as a social enterprise and phenomenon during this period. Thus, given this current state of the art, it is important to emphasize the need for more studies with a socio-historical interest in Arabic letter writing in the second half of the 19th century and in the early 20th century.

Focusing on the Lebanese-Palestinian writer and poet Mayy Ziyādah (1303-1360/1886-1941), Boutheina Khaldi provides some valuable clues about correspondence and letter writing during this period.[49] Khaldi speaks of "letter writing as a *Nahḍa* productive sphere,"[50] which included intellectuals, writers, and poets from different parts of the Arab world. We may therefore speak of letters as a medium that facilitated the exchange of ideas and the creation of domestic and transnational networks of writers, poets, and other figures from the cultural or intellectual elite. This networking aspect to letter writing may also be gathered and understood from the correspondence sampled for this study.

Similar to the pre-modern letters that circulated beyond the vicinities of governmental institutions, the Arab writers and intellectuals that engaged in this

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[48] Gully (2008: 74, 79-83).

[49] Khaldi (2009; 2017).

[50] Khaldi (2009: 13). Here, *nahḍah* (lit. 'rising; awakening') (Khaldi: *Nahḍa*) refers to a cultural movement that is commonly understood as a "[…]rebirth of Arabic literature and thought under Western influence since the second half of the 19th century" (Bearman et al. [2012: keyword: "nahḍa"]) up until 1920 at the latest, according to Abuldrazzak Patel (2013: x). The *nahḍah* phenomenon should not be understood as exclusively neo-classicist nor uncritically Europhilic. See Bearman et al. (2012: keyword: "nahḍa").

enterprise during the early 20th century were also aware of the possibility of their private correspondences entering the public sphere by the means of, for example, the press or academic institutions.[51] As Khaldi asserts, this may mean that (private) letters were an "audience-oriented communication," with it being only a question of time before they were published or shared with a third party.[52] Furthermore, in both the pre-modern and the modern contexts, the apparent ease with which letters could circulate in society is indicative of a well functioning or, at least, sufficiently functioning postal service.[53]

Additionally, the circulation of letters written by intellectuals and cultural figures suggests that letters could be utilized as a tool to influence public opinion on different subject matters. For example, we find that Mayy Ziyādah used her letters not only as a venue of, but also as an extension of her salon[54] (i.e. social or literary gathering) during the years of its existence (1913-1936) in terms of the conversations and exchanges of ideas that took place within that venue.[55] Therefore, letter writing during this period was not only an intellectual or literary exercise, but also an effective medium for introducing and discussing ideas and pressing issues that were deemed relevant for a larger public of readers, such as issues pertaining to education, science, and religion.[56]

Although Khaldi provides important insights into the social and transactional aspects of letter writing during the early 20th century, I do not necessarily agree with Khaldi's suggestion that the epistolary network was formed on the basis of an egalitarian premise that acted as "a significant departure […] from patriarchal and hierarchical structures."[57] Such a suggestion would mean that the parties involved were more or less on par with each other,[58] regardless of their gender, religious or denominational affiliations, notoriety (et cetera). I find it more likely that different types of dynamics, and combinations thereof, were shaped and entertained within such epistolary networks – as the present study suggests.[59]

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[51] Khaldi (2009: 3, 13). As we shall see later when discussing this study's theoretical framework (§ 5), this also becomes evident in the correspondence sampled for this study.
[52] Khaldi (2009: 13).
[53] See Khaldi (2009: 14) and Bearman et al. (2012: keyword: "barīd").
[54] Comparable to the tradition of the *majlis* (pl. *majālis*), that is, a hosted literary or social gathering.
[55] Khaldi (2009: 3).
[56] Cf. Khaldi (2009: 29).
[57] Khaldi (2009: 16).
[58] Khaldi (2009: 16).
[59] See § 7.2.1 and § 7.2.2.

3. A Formal Poetics of the Arabic Letter

The formalities and conventions that pertain to Arabic prose style vary across time and space. This was already noted in the 12th century study on prose (*nathr*) from the Maghrib and the Mashriq,[60] titled *Iḥkām ṣanʿat al-kalām* ('The Perfection of the Art of Speech'), by the Andalusian vizier (*wazīr*) from Seville (Ishbīlīyyah), Muḥammad ibn ʿAbd al-Ghafūr al-Kalāʿī (d. n/a), a contemporary of the poet Ibn Bassām al-Shantarīnī (d. 542/1147). Thus, I recognize that a fully comprehensive and diachronic account of the Arabic letter's formal poetics, in different periods and regions, would yield a complete study on its own.[61] Therefore, in this section, I will present and discuss a few well-known pre-modern (§ 3.1) and early modern (§ 3.2) theorizations on the art of Arabic letter writing and illustrate key components with extracts from personal correspondence by both known and lesser-known letter writers. Due to limitations of space and scope, I will have to be somewhat selective in this regard.

3.1 Pre-Modern Forms

As an indicator of the subject matter being presented, in the multifunctional, generic *risālah* format, al-Kalāʿī titled his recognized work "*Risālat iḥkām ṣanʿat al-kalām*" ('The Treatise on the Perfection of the Art of Speech'). This quite hazily chaptered treatise may be divided into two main parts: in the first one, al-Kalāʿī deals with composition (*al-inshāʾ*; al-Kalāʿī: *al-kitābah*) and its formalities and protocol (*ādāb*), and in the second – and largest – part of his work, he presents the varieties (*ḍurūb*, sg. *ḍarb*) of speech (*kalām*), which he found to be of different categories and sub-categories (*fuṣūl wa-aqsām*).[62] One main variety that he distinguishes is *tarsīl* ('correspondence'),[63] about which he writes:

> *Tarsīl* – may God strengthen you! – has differed over time and comes in various, beautiful forms [*anwāʿ*, sg. *nawʿ*]. Here, I have classified them [*bawwabtuhā*]

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[60] That is, the (fluidly defined) Western and Eastern parts of the Arab and Islamic world.
[61] For studies on Arabic letter writing, see e.g. al-Daḥrī (2003), Gully (2008), Khan (2008), and Grob (2010).
[62] al-Kalāʿī (1985: 27).
[63] For the whole chapter on *tarsīl*, see al-Kalāʿī (1985: 103-161).

and given them specific labels [*alqāb*, sg. *laqab*], so that they may be distinguished by them and those readers in want of an outline of the true nature [*ḥaqīqah*] of *bayān* [clear expression; eloquence] may have their request granted. Amongst what I have found [of forms] and accordingly labeled are: [1.] The Unornamented [*al-ʿĀṭil*]; [2.] The Ornamented [*al-Ḥālī*]; [3.] The Branched [*al-Mughaṣṣan*]; [4.] The Alternated' [*al-Mufaṣṣal*]; and [5.] The Originated [*al-Mubtadaʿ*]. [64]

In addition to the above-cited five forms or types of correspondences, al-Kalāʿī also names two other types: *al-Maṣnūʿ* ('The Skillfully Arranged') and *al-Muraṣṣaʿ* ('The Inlayed').[65] For the compositional formulary, the reader has to return to the first part of the treatise, where al-Kalāʿī presents its basic components. However, a discussion on the conclusion (*khitām*) is seemingly missing, a feature also noted by Adrian Gully (2008) when presenting the five fundamental pillars (*arkān*, sg. *rukn*) of composition,[66] as formulated by Ḍiyāʾ al-Dīn ibn al-Athīr (d. 630/1233). This absence may be explained by the lack of preceding theory and elaboration on the conclusion, *khitām*, in the literature dealing with Arabic epistolography.[67]

It should be noted, once more, that the contents and style of each component, their sequence, and even their presence, varies depending on contextual factors, such as time, place, and occasion. Furthermore, the components may – perhaps more often than not – merge into one another. I have drawn out the formulary according to al-Kalāʿī[68] as follows, with my own additional illustrations from private letters:

1. **The heading/addressation, *al-ʿunwān***, e.g. "From so-and-so" (*min fulān*) or "From so-and-so to so-and-so" (*min fulān ilá fulān*), with appropriate honorifics added.

2. **The exordium, *al-istiftāḥ***, which is exemplified by the *basmalah* (i.e. *bismillāh [al-raḥmān al-raḥīm]*, 'In the name of God [, the Most Gracious, the Most Merciful]).

3. **The salutation upon the Prophet, *al-ṣalāh ʿalá al-nabī***, which can take a variety of wordings, e.g. "May the peace and blessings of God be upon

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[64] al-Kalāʿī (1985: 103).

[65] For *al-Maṣnūʿ*, see al-Kalāʿī (1985: 121-134), and for *al-Muraṣṣaʿ*, see al-Kalāʿī (1985: 134-145).

[66] Ibn al-Athīr (1960: 96-99).

[67] Gully (2008: 133-134).

[68] al-Kalāʿī (1985: 103-161).

Muḥammad" (*wa-ṣallá Allāh ʿalá Muḥammad wa-sallama taslīman*), and "[In the name of God, the Most Gracious, the most Merciful,] and with salutations upon His Prophet" ([*bismillāh al-raḥmān al-raḥīm,] wa-bi-al-ṣalāh ʿalá rasūlihi wa-al-taslīm*).[69]

4. **The initial part of the letter, *ṣudūr al-rasāʾil*.** Here, it is recommended that the letter writer alludes to the objective (*al-gharaḍ al-madhkūr*) of the letter. In the onset of a letter of reproach (*ʿitāb*) and threat (*tahdīd*), the Maghribine Islamic judge (*qāḍin*) and poet Ibn ʿUmayrah al-Makhzūmī (d. 658/1259) hints at what is to come: "My dear friend, whose love I have been nourished with and due to whom, and his father, I have duly suffered […]" (*Ayyuhā l-khillu lladhī bi-ḥubbihi ghudhdhīt, wa-fīhi wa-fī abīhi udhīt [...]*)

5. **The transition [from the initial part to the objective], *al-takhalluṣ [min al-ṣudūr ilá al-gharaḍ al-madhkūr]*,** which may take the following division, or a merger thereof: a) Initiatory discourse, *ibtidāʾ al-khiṭāb*, e.g. "I write [to you]…" (*katabtu*), "My/our letter [to you]…" (*wa-kitābī; wa-kitābinā*). As an example, Ibn ʿUmayrah writes: "I write this letter as love and languish – as you know – are that from which my heart trembles […]" (*katabtuhu wa-l-waddu kamā tadrī, wa-sh-shawqu mimmā yajīshu bi-hi ṣadrī [...]*);[70] b) Confirmation [of the arrival of a letter], *radd al-jawāb*, e.g. "[Your letter] has arrived" (*wa-waṣala [kitābuka]; wa-warada [kitābuka]*). al-Kalāʿī provides the following example: "His gracious letter arrived – may God bestow upon him good fortune and augment his glory!" (*waṣala – waṣala llāhu saʿdahu, wa-aththala majdahu – kitābuhu l-karīm*).

6. **The invocation, *al-duʿāʾ*,** which according to al-Kalāʿī should be brief in order to avoid redundancy; however, floridity may be in place when writing to a king or an emir (*amīr*). In a letter from the Andalusian vizier Ibn Abī al-Khiṣāl Muḥammad al-Ghāfiqī (d. 540/1146) to his friend, the vizier Abū Bakr Muḥammad ibn ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz al-Lakhmī (d. 536/1142), he made the following prayer: "May God prolong the existence of my Commander (*amīr*) and my Leader (*imām*), whom I obey out of fear and love […]" (*aṭāla llāhu baqāʾa amīrī wa-imāmī lladhī uṭīʿuhu khawfan wa-wuddan [...]*).[71]

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69 For these generic examples and others, see al-Kalāʿī (1985: 64-67).
70 al-Lakhmī al-Sabtī (2013: 215).
71 al-Dāyah (1987): 51.

7. **The greeting, *al-salām***, which is deemed commendable (*mustaḥabb*), and its reply obligatory (*wājib*).[72] In a philiatic ("brotherly") letter, Ibn ʿUmayrah al-Makhzūmī (d. 658/1259) greets his addressee with the following words: "For you especially […] Greetings! As that from a brother of yours, whom your mother never gave birth to, or [as that of] a father that holds you in his comforting embrace" (*takhuṣṣuka […] taḥiyyatu akhin laka lam talid[hu] ummuka, aw abin bayna aḥnāʾi ḍ-ḍulūʾi yaḍummuk*).[73]

8. **The discourse, *al-khiṭāb***, which al-Kalāʿī divides into three typological categories, and where one typology's precedence over another is context dependent: a) Verbiage, *al-ishāb*; b) Brevity, *al-ījāz*; c) Balance, *al-musāwāh*.

In *al-Mathal al-sāʾir fī adab al-kātib wa-al-shāʿir* ('The Current Model for the Literary Discipline of the Scribe and the Poet'), Ibn al-Athīr soberly assures the reader that, while composition – in addition to its five pillars – has several [stylistic] conditions (*sharāʾiṭ*, sg. *sharīṭah*); the scribe is not expected to bring them all forth in one single letter. Instead, each one of them should be displayed on the appropriate occasion.[74] The five necessary pillars of any composition of significance,[75] in the view of Ibn al-Athīr, may however be presented as a comparison to the formulary of al-Kalāʿī:

1. **The exordium, *al-maṭlaʿ***, which, as with al-Kalāʿī's formulary, could allude to the intent (*maqṣad*) of letter, or be built upon a sense of originality and elegance.

2. **The invocation, *al-duʿāʾ***, which should be formulated in the initial part of the letter (*ṣadr al-kitāb*) and likewise hinge on the intent of the letter.

3. **The transition [of ideas], *al-takhalluṣ***, concerns the scribe's movement from one idea (*maʿnan*, pl. *maʿānin*) to another and the necessary interlinkage between them.

4. **Expressions, *al-alfāẓ* (sg. *lafẓ*)**, should consist of common, but not over-used (nor outlandish), phraseology. Ibn al-Athīr further explains

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72. al-Kalāʿī gives the jurisprudential opinion that replying to the *salām* (i.e. the Islamic greeting) generally is a religious obligation.
73. al-Lakhmī al-Sabtī (2013: 194).
74. Ibn al-Athīr (1960: 96).
75. Ibn al-Athīr (1960: 96-99).

that these common expressions should be fashioned in a way that appears unique.

5. **Quranic or Prophetic concept(s)**, of which the scribe should utilize at least one in the letter. Ibn al-Athīr also emphasizes that this *rukn* is reserved for the scribe and does not concern the poet. Moreover, prosification/paraphrasing (*ḥall*) seems to be the preferred method, rather than quotation/inclusion (*taḍmīn*). As an example of this epistolary component, we may take the prime example of the secretary of Marwān II, ʿAbd al-Ḥamīd al-Kātib, who, again, is widely considered to be the founder of Arabic epistolary style:[76]

[1.] *sāʾa mā kasabat yadāhu*, [2.] *wa-mā llāhu bi-ẓallāmin bi-l-ʿabīd* [1. and 2., rephrasing of either Q3:182 or Q22:10], [3.] *wa-biʾsa-mā sawwalat lahu nafsuhu l-ammāratu bi-s-sūʾi* [rephrased combination of Q12:18; 58], [4] *wa-llāhu min warāʾihi bi-l-mirṣād* [rephrasing of Q89:14], [5.] ***wa-sayaʿlamu lladhīna ẓalamū ayya munqalabin yanqalibūn*** [bold to indicate direct quotation from Q26: 227].[77]

[1.] Evil is that which his two hands has earned [2.] and God is never unjust to His servants [1. and 2., rephrasing of either Q3:182 or Q22:10]. [3.] Low indeed is that which his evil-commanding soul has insinuated to him [rephrased combination of Q12:18; 58] [4.] and God is Ever Watchful behind him [rephrasing of Q89:14]. [5.] And those who have wronged are going to know to what [kind of] return they will be returned [direct quotation from Q26: 227].[78]

It would be almost impossible to discuss pre-modern Arabic epistolography without a mention of the Egyptian scholar and chancery clerk al-Qalqashandī. His grand *Ṣubḥ al-aʿshá fī ṣināʿat al-inshāʾ* ('The Dawn for the Blind on the Craft of Composition') (completed in 814/1411) is one of the last contributions to the genre of administrative literature during this period.[79] *Ṣubḥ al-aʿshá* is a work of encyclopedic and instructional character that caters for all the theoretical and practical knowledge that a secretary might need for his profession. The work is

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76 See Wadād al-Qāḍī's (1998) book chapter, "The impact of the Qurʾān on the epistolography of ʿAbd al-Ḥamīd," for a study of the various textual Quranic occurances in the epistolary style of ʿAbd al-Ḥamīd al-Kātib. Also see the elaborate study of Iḥsān ʿAbbās (1988: 25-88) in his critical edition of the letters of ʿAbd al-Ḥamīd, as well as the encyclopedic entry in Bearman et al. (2012: keyword: "ʿAbd al-Ḥamīd").

77 ʿAbbās (1988: 236). This extract is also used as an illustration in al-Qāḍī (1998: 299).

78 The English translation of Q26:227 is by Ṣaḥeeḥ International (2004 [1997]: 365). See *The Qurʾān: English Meanings*.

79 See van Berkel (2009: 331-340). For selections of *Ṣubḥ al-aʿshá* translated into English, see Abdelhamid and El-Toudy (2017).

unique and significant in the sense that it contains specimens of letters and documents extending from the time of the first Caliphs up until the time of the author, from both the Mashriq and the Maghrib, which may provide insights into changes that occurred in epistolary formulae and style over time.[80]

With 14 published volumes and close to 3000 edited pages,[81] it would be impossible to give an account on *Ṣubḥ al-aʿshá* that would do it justice in this limited space. Without diminishing the significance of this work, it perhaps will suffice to say that, apart from the great number of letters and documents,[82] it does not bring much new or diverging substance to the genre of epistolography and administrative literature.[83]

Following *Ṣubḥ al-aʿshá*, we find two other chancery manuals that have been deemed the last works of this sort that had Arabic as their administrative language:[84] first, one by the son of al-Qalqashandī, Najm al-Dīn Muḥammad al-Qalqashandī (d. 876/1471), titled *Qalāʾid al-jumān fī muṣṭalaḥ mukātabāt al-zamān* ('The Pearl Necklaces regarding the Conventions of Contemporary Correspondence'), and another one by the title *Kitāb al-maqṣad al-rafīʿ, al-manshaʾ al-hādī ilá ṣināʿat al-inshāʾ* ('The High Objective: The Guiding Source to Composition) by Bahāʾ al-Dīn Muḥammad al-Khālidī al-ʿUmarī (9th/15th century). When the Mamlūks of Egypt and Syria were defeated by Selim I (r. 512–1520) between the years 1516 and 1517, and in connection to Selim I's establishment of the Ottoman Empire, the executive language of the administration was now replaced by Turkish for the centuries to come. The new language policy within the administration implies that the role of Arabic letter writing became marginalized, at least on an official level.

3.2 Early Modern and Modern Forms

Before setting out to discuss modern letter writing, it might be fitting to first say a few words about composition (*inshāʾ*), and epistolography more specifically, during the preceding Ottoman period.

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80 See Fleet et al. (2014: keyword: "Chancery manuals").
81 al-Qalqashandī (1922).
82 For the section on private letters (*ikhwāniyyāt*), beginning with the time of the Salaf, the first three generations of Muslims, and moving forward, see al-Qalqashandī (1922, vol 8: 126-233).
83 As noted in Bearman et al. (2014: keyword: "Chancery manuals").
84 Bearman et al. (2014: keyword: "Chancery manuals").

The surviving works from this period are either few or undiscovered and inadequately studied.[85] They are, however, crucial for studying, albeit speculatively, the extent to which pre-Ottoman epistolary style and protocol lives on in later works, although, because of this void, it is of course difficult to assess the significance as well as the original production of this genre during this period.

In Gully's study, we find mentions of works such as *Badīʿ al-inshāʾ wa-al-ṣifāt fī al-mukātabāt wa-al-murāsalāt* ('The Singularity of Epistolary Style and the Facets of Correspondence') (1874)[86] by the Egyptian scholar Murʿī al-Karmī al-Maqdisī (n/a-1033/n/a-1623/4), *al-ʿAjab al-ʿujāb fīmā yufīdu al-kuttāb* ('The Wonder of Wonders in That Which Benefits the Scribes'),[87] by Aḥmad ibn Muḥammad al-Yamanī al-Shirwānī, and an anonymous work by the name *Kitāb majmūʿ al-rasāʾil wa-ghayr dhālik* ('The Collection of Letters and Miscellany') (dated 11th/17th century), which is an example of other aggregated works from this period containing letters.[88]

When looking into the formal poetics of the Arabic letter in the modern era, I have primarily consulted the following sources: *Badīʿ al-inshāʾ* by al-Karmī; *Kitāb inshāʾ Ḥasan al-ʿAṭṭār* ('Ḥasan al-ʿAṭṭār's Manual on Composition') (1860/1861 [earlier published 1826?])[89] by the scholar of Maghribine origin Ḥasan al-ʿAṭṭār (1180-1250/1766-1834/5); and *al-Shihāb al-thāqib fī ṣināʿat al-kātib* (The Shooting Star on the Art of the Writer') (1889 [2nd ed.]),[90] by the linguist and writer Saʿīd al-Khūrī al-Shartūnī (1264-1331/1849-1912), who is also considered one of the last contributors to the Arabic epistolographic genre.[91]

Published in the first half of the 19th century in Cairo, al-ʿAṭṭār's manual on composition comprises various texts, both borrowed and original ones. His work includes letter models customized and deemed to be appropriate for a particular addressee, such as a judge (*qāḍin*), a Shaykh of a Sufi order (*shaykh ṭarīqah*), a grammarian (*ʿālim naḥawī*), an emir, or a vizier. He also provides models for how

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[85] Gully (2008: 19-20).

[86] The British Library holds a copy of the second edition of this work, published in 1882 by the same publishing house (Asitane-i Aliyye [Istanbul]: Maṭbaʿat al-Jawānib).

[87] First published in Calcutta in the year 1813. For other editions, see e.g. the Maẓhar al-ʿAjāʾib 3rd edition (Calcutta, 1866).

[88] Gully (2008: 19-20).

[89] See the imprint of the Maṭbaʿat Būlāq edition (Cairo, 1826) from the British Library.

[90] The first edition from this publishing house came out in the year 1884 (Beirut: Maṭbaʿat al-Ābāʾ al-Mursalīn al-Yasūʿīyīn).

[91] Gully (2008: 21).

to write a response upon receiving a letter by some of these addressees.[92] The manual also contains a longer sequence of models on brotherly letters,[93] as well a love letter.[94] Besides letters, al-ʿAṭṭār incorporated exemplary models of other formats, such as book chapters on different subjects, licenses (*ijāzah*, pl. *ijāzāt*), sermons (*khuṭbah*, pl. *khuṭab*), and poetry.

As recognized by Gully, his work, together with the earlier formulary by al-Karmī, demonstrates continuity in epistolary composition with the formularies found in pre-Ottoman literature.[95] However, Gully suggests that the prevalent usage of rhymed prose, *sajʿ*, had already become a "dead end" at the time of al-Karmī (i.e. the 17th century), though it would take another 250 years or so for the style to be forsaken within administration.[96] Regarding this matter, one may perhaps say that *sajʿ* rather became a victim of automatization that made it, for a long time, function as an "automatic stock" within a stylistic paradigm, and which came to be viewed by later "modernist" writers as a sign of deterioration. Thus, writers sought to renovate and deautomatize their epistolary style.[97] However, the style of *sajʿ* continued to be used by letter writers in the modern period outside the administrative spheres.[98]

Moving to *al-Shihāb al-thāqib*, al-Shartūnī gives not only appropriate and applicable examples of phraseology and model letters to various addressees, such as a cardinal (*kardīnāl*), a bishop (*usquf*), one's mother, or a peer, as well as a range of letter subjects, he also outlines six basic elements in a letter's structure:[99]

1. **The initiatory part, *al-ṣadr***, which according to al-Shartūnī is the place for titles and honorifics, and which should appropriately praise the addressee in accordance with their social and/or ecclesiastical/religious rank and the convention of the time. For example, a priest should be addressed as "The

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[92] E.g. the responses to an eloquent writer and to a noble scholar (al-ʿAṭṭār [1860/1861: 38-40, 47-49]).

[93] al-ʿAṭṭār (1860/1861: 68-104; see also 163, 188).

[94] al-ʿAṭṭār (1860/1861: 116).

[95] Gully (2008: 19).

[96] Gully (2008: 19).

[97] For a more elaborated definition of automatization and deautomatization, see Sebeok (1986, vol. 1: 66-67). Cf. Snir (2017: 3, 176-177, 181, 200, 208, 210).

[98] The correspondence between Muḥammad al-Mukhtār al-Sūsī and Shaykh al-Ṭāhir al-Īfrānī is a clear example of modern letter writers who incorporate elements of *sajʿ* into their epistolary style, even if inconsistently.

[99] See al-Shartūnī (1889: 10-19).

Reverend Father" (*al-ab al-jalīl al-khūrī*) and a brother, or a peer, as "[To] my respected brother" (*ilá janāb* [or *haḍrat*] [*sayyidī*] *akhī*).[100]

2. **The beginning, *al-ibtidāʾ*,** which contains greetings and assertions that should be characterized by conciseness and succinctness.

3. **The objective, *al-gharaḍ al-maqṣūd*,** refers to the reason for writing the letter and it constitutes the chief support (*ʿumdah*) of any letter. Here, the letter writer must demonstrate and establish his objective, otherwise the purpose of the letter will escape the reader and the subject matter become distorted.

4. **The completion, *al-khitām*,** which should contain a brief summation of the purport of the letter and is often ended with an invocation.

5. **Signature, *al-imḍāʾ*,** which, in the words of al-Shartūnī, is the name of the letter writer that functions as a mark of the letter's originator and an assurance of its contents.

6. **Date, *al-tārīkh*,** which should always be accompanied by the name of the place from which the letter has been issued in order to secure the conveyance of a potential reply. If the letter emanates from a large city, the quarter (*maḥallah*), together with its numeral (*ʿadad*), must also be specified. This also applies to commercial quarters (*aswāq*, sg. *sūq*).

While the first three sections are similar to the pre-modern ways of opening or initiating the epistolary discourse, sections 4-6 show a concern for the formalities of completing this discourse, which is missing in pre-modern epistolographic theory. Gully recognizes that it is mostly due to al-Shartūnī's work that the relationship between composition (*inshāʾ*) and epistolography was kept alive in the early modern era.[101] Although the letter models found in *al-Shihāb al-thāqib* may share stylistic features with pre-modern letters, Gully concludes that this important work of al-Shartūnī "displays more similarities with the popularised epistolary manuals of French society than it does with the formal, somewhat rigid formulae found in al-Qalqašhandī's [al-Qalqashandī] work, for example."[102] Thus, in this case, we seem to be confronted with an attempt to unify two epistolographic traditions – the Arab-Islamic *inshāʾ* tradition and 19th century French letter writing

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[100] For these examples and more, see al-Shartūnī (1889: 10-13).
[101] Gully (2008: 20). See also Bearman et al. (2012: keyword: "al-<u>Sh</u>artūnī").
[102] Gully (2008: 20).

– or, alternatively, to "renovate" the older of the two.[103] al-Shartūnī – himself
belonging to the conservative camp of Arab linguists and philologists of the
nahḍah, like Buṭrus al-Bustānī and Nāṣīf al-Yāzijī[104] – nevertheless writes, when
presenting the second part of the epistolary structure, that:

> Our contemporaries have a tendency to emulate the Arabs of former times in their
> condensation of the exordium and their hurry to proceed to the purpose
> [*al-marūm*] of the letter. Although, due to the habitual course of fate, when it
> comes to the ruler and his subject, a great majority of them believe that this is a
> European technique [*ṭarīqah firanjiyyah*] from which their love for succinctness
> and imitation has risen.[105]

al-Shartūnī makes a comment of a similar nature when presenting the fourth part
of a letter, where he writes that these conventions of the *khitām* are also found in
historical letters, whether we are dealing with scholarly (*ʿilmiyyah*) or disputatious
(*jadaliyyah*) letters.[106] He notes that the fifth part (*al-imḍāʾ*) can also be found in
pre-modern letters, although in a slightly different fashion, where the letter opens
with the name of the letter writer followed by the name of the addressee.[107] This
convention is not only shared by both pre-Islamic and later Muslim letter writers,
but is also the style of the Apostolic letters, such as the first epistle of Paul to
Timothy: "From Paul an Apostle of Jesus Christ, by the commandment of God our
Savior, and of Jesus Christ our hope, unto Timothy my true son in faith […]" (*min
Būlus rasūl Yasūʿ al-masīḥ bi-amr Allāh mukhalliṣinā wa-al-masīḥ Yasūʿ rajāʾinā
ilá Tīmūtāwus al-ibn al-ṣādiq fī al-īmān*).[108]

On the dialectics of Arab and non-Arab epistolary tradition, al-Shartūnī further
asserts that, for the ancients, it used to be customary to address the single recipient
of a letter by their personal pronoun, rather than by a "royal" you (i.e. a second
person plural form).[109] The latter convention, he argues, was later adopted by Arab

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[103] In connection to this, it is worth mentioning that, in one of his letters, Muḥammad
     al-Ḥulaywī compares his correspondence with Abū al-Qāsim al-Shābbī to the
     correspondence that took place between the two French writers Alphonse de Lamartine (d.
     1869) and Charles Augustine Sainte-Beuve (d. 1869) (al-Ḥulaywī [1966: 124]). Although,
     in this case, perhaps more so in terms of the correspondence's ethos and pathos than of its
     formal aspects.
[104] Bearman et al. (2012: keyword: "al-Shartūnī").
[105] al-Shartūnī (1889: 13-14).
[106] al-Shartūnī (1889: 14).
[107] al-Shartūnī (1889: 14).
[108] English translation based on the translated Bible quote in al-Shartūnī (1889: 14). Cf. 1599
     Geneva Bible (GNV), 1 Timothy 1.1-2.
[109] al-Shartūnī (1889: 15).

writers at some point, probably under the influence of and in contact with non-Arabs, like the Turks and the Europeans. al-Shartūnī is a clear propagator of the former, which he deems to be the most natural and appropriate form of address, and hence, it is also the style that he himself adopted in his own letters:

> I recognize the former as a return to the old practice [*al-iṣṭilāḥ al-qadīm*]; it is what the natural disposition [of man] dictates [*talqīn al-sajiyyah*] and within the boundaries of courtesy [*adab*]. Thus, I have followed this practice in my own letters. However, whoever wants to persist in adhering to the latter, despotic practice [*al-iṣṭilāḥ al-fāshī*] should not have this held against him.[110]

As regards the insertion of dates, al-Shartūnī asserts that this too was a known practice in pre-modern letter writing. However, within the Arabic tradition, writers used to place the date at the very end of the letter (*fī asfal al-kitāb*), considering that it was viewed as surplus rather than necessary, compared to the European tradition, where the date was placed at the top of the letter (*fī aʿlá al-kitāb*), which seems to indicate the writers' greater concern with recording dates.[111] By the time of the author, it seems that many writers had endorsed the European way of dating and, once more, al-Shartūnī carefully reassures the reader that there is no blame in matters of practice or convention (*iṣṭilāḥ*).[112]

The extent of such preferences is of course difficult to assess when most of the available letters are found in published or critical editions, in which case the editorial work does not have to be faithful to the original layout of the letters. As an exception, we find pictures of the actual letter manuscripts in *al-Shuʿlah al-zarqāʾ* ('The Blue Flame') (published 1984), containing private letters from the Lebanese-American writer and visual artist Jibrān Khalīl Jibrān (1300-1349/1883-1931) to Mayy Ziyādah. The pictures clearly show that this particular letter writer alternated between the two conventions, but with what seems to be a preference for the older practice of placing the date at the end of the letter in connection to his signature (*imḍāʾ*).[113] As one might also expect, and despite dating apparently becoming a more accentuated feature in modern letter writing, not everyone was as diligent in this task. The Egyptian writer Tawfīq al-Ḥakīm (1315-1407/1898-1987) readily notes, in the preface of *Zahrat al-ʿumr* ('Flower of Life'), a correspondence between him and a French friend (first published 1943), that "[…]

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[110] al-Shartūnī (1889: 15).
[111] See al-Shartūnī (1889: 19). For dating, dates, and eras in the pre-Islamic and Islamic world, see Bearman et al. (2012: keyword: "taʾrīkh").
[112] al-Shartūnī (1889: 19).
[113] For the section of the manscripts, see Jibrān (1984: 179-281).

it is my obligation to point out that I unfortunately discovered that the majority of the letters are not dated."[114]

In summary, this section has demonstrated a continuity in modern epistolary composition with the formularies found in pre-Ottoman epistolary composition as they are presented in epistolographic sources from each period. However, this is not without exception. The most apparent difference is the prevalent usage of *saj'* in pre-modern epistolary composition, which was replaced with prose (*nathr*) within the administrative spheres, although *saj'* continued, to some extent, to be used outside the administrative spheres.

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[114] al-Ḥakīm (1998?: 15).

PART II: METHOD

4. Primary Material

This chapter provides a broad description of the primary material of this study. The focus is on presenting the published editions from which the letter-corpus was sampled and commenting on the editorial transparency in *Rasāʾil al-Shābbī* and *al-Illighiyyāt* (§ 4.1). The chapter also elaborates on the sampling procedure that generated the letter-corpus of the study (§ 4.2), the representativity and generalizability of the letter-corpus (§ 4.2.2), and a brief synopsis of each sampled correspondence (§ 4.3).

4.1 The Published Editions and Editorial Transparency

This section presents each of the two works, *Rasāʾil al-Shābbī* and *al-Illighiyyāt*, separately and discusses the way in which the author-editors Muḥammad al-Ḥulaywī and Muḥammad al-Mukhtār al-Sūsī expound (or do not expound) on their editorial work with the manuscript originals and transcriptions of the letters.

4.1.1 *Rasāʾil al-Shābbī*

In year 1966, the letter collection titled *Rasāʾil al-Shābbī* ('al-Shābbī's Letters')[115] was first published in Tunis. It was compiled by the poet Abū al-Qāsim al-Shābbī's close friend, the writer Muḥammad al-Ḥulaywī, about thirty years after his death. This work incorporates the letters that were exchanged between al-Ḥulaywī, al-Shābbī, and their mutual friend, the writer Muḥammad al-Bashrūsh, from 1929 up until the death of al-Shābbī in 1934. In the introduction to the collection, al-Ḥulaywī lists four reasons for postponing the letters' entry into the public sphere:

1. the private nature of the letters, through which the three friends could speak freely about personal and public matters;

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[115] al-Ḥulaywī, Muḥammad (ed.) (1966), *Rasāʾil al-Shābbī.* Tunis: Dār al-Maghrib al-ʿArabī (206 pp.).

2. the letters speak about individuals, both friends and foes, some of whom still were alive and others who had passed away but still had many ardent followers and sympathizers;

3. the fact that the letters represent a time of the letter writers' youth that was marked by fervor, spontaneity, and rebelliousness towards individuals, outlooks, and social phenomena, which does not necessarily reflect the views and manners of at least one of the letter-writers – al-Ḥulaywī – at the time of the letters' publication;

4. the worry that he (al-Ḥulaywī) might be unjustly charged of opportunism if his own letters were also included alongside the letters by al-Shābbī.[116]

Although al-Ḥulaywī writes that the sole purpose of his own letters is to contextualize al-Shābbī's letters and provide necessary details regarding the circumstances, motives, and reasons behind the letters, he feared that people might take their inclusion in the collection as a means of personal gain or as an attempt to place himself on the same level as the hailed al-Shābbī.[117] A humble effort, indeed, to diminish the independent value of these letters.

Thus, the main concerns that kept these personal letters hidden from the public eye for over three decades seems to have been their potential reception by the public and its reverberations. This also suggests to us that the contents of the letters may have stirred up a variety of emotions in their readers, to whom the ideological contestations and breaches of the Arab world in the early 20th century were still alive and kicking. Accordingly, a project like *Rasāʾil al-Shābbī* was initially perceived as controversial enough to be put on hold until the right time had arrived. In a *nota bene* at the beginning of the collection, al-Ḥulaywī nevertheless mentions occasions when some of al-Shābbī's letters had been published prior to *Rasāʾil al-Shābbī* in issues of Tunisian journals and newspapers:[118]

> Letter No. 3, published almost in its entirety in the journal *al-Afkār* ('Reflections') (November 1936).

> Letter No. 25, published in the journal *al-Nadwah* ('The Forum') (October 1953)

> Letter No. 8, published in the newspaper *al-Zaytūnah* ('Zaytūnah Newspaper') (November 1954).

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[116] al-Ḥulaywī (1966: 9-10).
[117] al-Ḥulaywī (1966: 10).
[118] al-Ḥulaywī (1966: 13).

Letter No. 28, published in the journal *al-Fikr* ('Thought') (October 1956).

Letter No. 29, published in the journal *al-Fikr* (October 1956).

Letter No. 22, published in the journal *al-Fikr* (October 1958).

The fact is, however, that some of al-Shābbī's letters were also brought to the public by Abū al-Qāsim Muḥammad Karrū five years prior to *Rasāʾil al-Shābbī* in his *Āthār al-Shābbī wa-ṣadāhu fī al-mashriq* ('The Work of al-Shābbī and his Echo in the East'),[119] although it only features two of them and at least one of them is not complete.[120] Interestingly enough, both al-Ḥulaywī and Karrū contributed a preface to each other's work.

Parts of al-Shābbī's correspondences later reappear in publications such as *Dīwān Abī al-Qāsim al-Shābbī wa-rasāʾiluh* ('The Diwan and Letters of Abū al-Qāsim al-Shābbī'), edited by Majīd Ṭarād (1994),[121] *Dīwān Abī al-Qāsim al-Shābbī* ('The Diwan of Abū al-Qāsim al-Shābbī'), edited by Imīl Kabā (1997),[122] and a later collection by same title as that of Ṭarād, published in the year 2001, which was edited by Rājī al-Asmar.[123] However, the correspondence in these collections is incomplete in the sense that all the letters of al-Ḥulaywī, and the annexed letters by their mutual friend Muḥammad al-Bashrūsh, are missing, even though both authors list *Rasāʾil al-Shābbī* as one of their sources.[124] This is because we are dealing with different kinds of projects and none of the

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[119] Karrū, Abū al-Qāsim Muḥammad (1961), *Āthār al-Shābbī wa-ṣadāhu fī al-mashriq*. Beirut: al-Maktab al-Tijārī lil-Ṭibāʿah wa-al-Tawzīʿ wa-al-Nashr.

[120] The first one is a letter to al-Ḥulaywī written at the beginning of August 1929 (found in al-Ḥulaywī [1966: 25-30]). The letter is, however, short of the ending paragraphs and margin notes of the original. The second letter was sent to the Tunisian writer Muṣṭafá Khrayyif (d. 1386/1967), written in 23 October 1930 from Tozeur (Tūzir). See Karrū (1961: 156-160; 161-163).

[121] Ṭarād, Majīd (ed.) (1994), *Dīwān Abī al-Qāsim al-Shābbī wa-rasāʾiluh*. Beirut: Dār al-Kitāb al-ʿArabī.

[122] Kabā, Imīl (ed.) (1997), *Dīwān Abī al-Qāsim al-Shābbī*. Beirut: Dār al-Jīl. Especially the second volume of this work, a main chapter of which contains the 34 letters from al-Shābbī found in al-Ḥulaywī's collection, as well as Kabā's commentary on these letters.

[123] al-Asmar, Rājī (ed.) (2001), *Dīwān Abī al-Qāsim al-Shābbī wa-rasāʾiluh*. Beirut: Dār Maktabat al-Maʿārif.

[124] The expection being two letters from al-Ḥulaywī to al-Shābbī dated 21 February 1930 (*ca.* 22 Ramaḍān 1348) and 4 November 1931 (*ca.* Jumādá al-Thānī 1350), both of which were written from Béni Khalled (Banī Khallād) (Ṭarād [1994: 232-233, 242-243]; al-Asmar [2001: 233-234, 243-244]).

above-mentioned collections are epistolaria (letter collections) in the same sense as *Rasāʾil al-Shābbī*.[125]

This raises the question as to why editors over the years have deemed the letters significant enough to be republished. One may ask if it is for their seemingly intimate quality, or if there is an important aesthetic aspect to this impetus that is often forgotten by scholars. Whatever incentive the editors may have had for republishing the letters, at the very least it is a strong indication that the letters have been considered a part of al-Shābbī's oeuvre.

To include an author's, or a poet's, letters within their oeuvre and, by implication, regard them as literature may be resisted by some modern-day skeptics. Yet this stance has gained many supporters, especially in the last two decades. The Swedish literary scientist Martin Lamm proclaimed that Charles Dickens was just as good a storyteller in his letters as in his novels.[126] Kerstin Dahlbäck calls for the letter, as an independent form and as literature, to be added to the author's oeuvre.[127]

From a pragmatic perspective, the ontological status of letters – and other texts – can surely be formed irrespective of the writer's intentions upon its reception by any second or third party. It is nonetheless clearly hinted in one of the letters from al-Shābbī to al-Ḥulaywī that he was made aware, by their friend al-Bashrūsh, of the feasibility of having their correspondence published in the future.[128]

Overall, as an editor, al-Ḥulaywī does provide some transparency as regards his editorial work with the manuscript originals and their transcription.[129] He

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[125] It is perhaps worth mentioning that, in an article dedicated to the memory of al-Shābbī, the Iraqi poet and journalist Ramzī ʿAqrāwī (2015) mentions a work by the same title. This work is described as a large collection of letters and is said to include additional correspondences of al-Shābbī. Among the correspondents, ʿAqrāwī mentions the Syrian poet ʿAlī al-Nāṣir (d. 1390/1970), the two Egyptian poets Ibrāhīm Nājī (d. 1372/1953) and Aḥmad Zakī Abū Shādī (d. 1374/1955), who was also the editor of the journal *Apollo* (*Abūllū*), and the Tunisian writers Muṣṭafá Khrayyif (d. 1386/1967) and Muḥammad al-Ḥalabī (d. n/a). However, I have not been able to find an independent work fitting this description. It is possible that the title found in ʿAqrāwī's article is a reference to volumes 3 and 5 of the Complete Works project, *Mawsūʿat al-Shābbī*, by Karrū, published in 1999, which, in addition to al-Ḥulaywī's complete book, contains this correspondence. Alternatively, it could be a reference to the heading in Karrū's earlier *Āthār al-Shābbī wa-ṣadāhu fī al-mashriq*, which does indeed list the above-mentioned correspondence, with the exception of al-Ḥalabī. In this work, Karrū also adds the Egyptian poet ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz ʿAtīq (d. 1396/1976). See Karrū (1961: 24-26).

[126] Lamm (1947: 85). Also referred to and quoted in Dahlbäck (2003: 160).

[127] Dahlbäck (2003: 160).

[128] The letter was sent on 24 February 1933 (28 Shawwāl 1351) from Tozeur and can be found in *Rasāʾil al-Shābbī*. See al-Ḥulaywī (1966: 105).

[129] al-Ḥulaywī (1966: 13).

explains that the names of some individuals and journals have been stripped down to only their initial letter, and in some cases, names are even fully replaced by punctuation or asterisks. Since al-Shābbī almost exclusively used the Islamic calendar when dating his letters, especially in his early correspondence, al-Ḥulaywī inserted footnotes indicating the corresponding date according to the Gregorian calendar.

Regarding the manuscript originals, al-Ḥulaywī also writes that al-Shābbī used to be very negligent in following the standard orthographical rules pertaining to the *hamza* letter (ء ʾ) and the conjunction *an* (أن) when followed by the *lā* of negation (i.e. أن لا *an lā* as opposed to ألا *allā*), and when deemed impossible to ignore, these disregards or mistakes have been adjusted. al-Shābbī also tended to open his letters with conventional exordia, *taḥmīdāt*, such as "*al-ḥamdu lillāh*" ('Praise be to God') and "*ṣalātan wa-salāman*" ('Peace and Blessings [upon the Prophet]'), which al-Ḥulaywī has omitted in his transcription without indicating in which letters they occurred.[130]

In relation to the total corpus of letters, it is the editor's belief that all the letters that he received from al-Shābbī, and had so dearly conserved as objects of value, have been included in the collection. However, al-Ḥulaywī does write that he also came across a fragment of a letter, of which the first part was missing, after having lent specimens of al-Shābbī's handwritten letters to several Tunisian journals, newspapers, and cultural organizations. It is assumed that the lost part of the letter remained with one of the borrowers, and was never returned.[131] Additionally, al-Ḥulaywī has also provided the reader with endnotes that bring clarity to certain references and expressions in the letters.

Returning to the alleged completeness of the correspondence, Kabā does not seem very convinced by the words of al-Ḥulaywī. In *Dīwān Abī al-Qāsim al-Shābbī*, Kabā identifies two additional letters that are not found in al-Ḥulaywī's collection[132] and points out that even the transmission, in terms of the original letters' content, is faulty.[133] Thus, if Kabā's conclusions are to be trusted, some unquantifiable amount of the original content of the correspondence has, either by mistake or deliberately, or both, been discarded from the letter collection. Although it is difficult to determine the nature and quantity of the omitted material,

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[130] These exordia can actually be found written out in Karrū (1961: 156; 1999, vol. 5: 213ff.).

[131] Similarly, al-Ḥulaywī mentions that Letter No. 3 (1966: 25-30) was never returned to him by the concessionaire of *al-Afkār*, Ḥamūdah Gūjah (Qūjah), despite his efforts (1966: 13).

[132] The first letter, found in Djerid (al-Jarīd), is dated 23 April 1934 and the second one 24 May 1935 (Kabā, 1997, vol. 2, part 3: 4-5).

[133] See Kabā (1997, vol. 2, part 3: 5).

one could somewhat reasonably assume that, if this was a deliberate discard, the contents in question must have been regarded as either too trivial or too confidential, or delicate, to be presented to the public.

What is of importance for this study, however, is the independent work as it has been created and put together for a public audience. It is a premise of the study that the epistolarium – and any epistolarium or published form of a letter for that matter – does not mimetically reflect the ur-letter(s) nor the historical writing situation.[134] Thus, the historicity of the letters is not what is of interest for scrutinization. This also ties into my reason for not including other published work that includes additional letters written or received by al-Shābbī, such as the Complete Works project by Karrū. As argued above, third party works like that of Karrū are a different kind of project with a different function. The creators of both *al-Illighiyyāt* and *Rasāʾil al-Shābbī* may be regarded as second (and first) parties; they are the concerned and existing parties within the correspondence. This is where the autobiographical construction and interpersonal dimension also come into play. Thus, in this case, quality takes precedence over quantity. The point is to study the individual work, whether *al-Illighiyyāt* or *Rasāʾil al-Shābbī*, even if it is not the "whole [complete/true] story," but rather what two of the actual parties involved wanted to create and present to the public.

4.1.2 *al-Illighiyyāt*

The memoir (*mudhakkirāt*) of Muḥammad al-Mukhtār al-Sūsī's political exile from Marrakesh to his hometown Illigh between the years 1937 and 1945,[135] *al-Illighiyyāt* ('Writings from Illigh'), is a work in three parts published in the year 1963 by Maṭbaʿat al-Najāḥ (Casablanca),[136] before the passing of the author. A newer omnibus edition of *al-Illighiyyāt* was later published in 2015 by Dār al-Kutub al-ʿIlmiyyah (Beirut)[137] and it is this particular edition that I have worked with during the course of the present study. After the death of al-Sūsī, it is mainly his son, Riḍá Allāh ʿAbd al-Wāfī al-Mukhtār al-Sūsī, who has been responsible for presenting his father's literary output to the public.[138] The time period covered by *al-Illighiyyāt*, which coincided with the Second World War, may be labeled as

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[134] On theorizing letters, see Stanley (2004; 2011) and Stanley et al. (2012).
[135] 1937-03-11 (1355-12-28) – 1945 (1365).
[136] Comprising 725 pp. in total.
[137] Comprising 864 pp. in total.
[138] See R. al-Sūsī (2005: 465).

"post-*naḥḍah*," given that it is generally agreed upon that the *naḥḍah* had already ended by the First World War or, alternatively, by 1920 at the very latest.[139]

While *al-Illighiyyāt* chiefly falls under the *mudhakkirāt* category, it also has prominent features of a literary collection (*majmūʿah adabiyyah*).[140] In addition to diary-like entries, it also contains a large amount of poetry (original and borrowed), literary gems of the Illigh region, accounts of literary gatherings (sg. *majlis*, pl. *majālis*), and his many different correspondences within his social network, in the form of both literary and personal *rasāʾil* (letters). The author himself describes the book as a "hodgepodge" (*kashkūl*) that comprises a little of everything from his exile, a work that he did not allow himself to complete until the day he finally left Illigh for Marrakech.[141]

Furthermore, the brief, *post facto* footnotes that are provided by the author himself throughout the work add linguistic explanations, references, and explanatory commentaries that particularly alleviate the comprehension of the contents for readers who are unfamiliar with the cues and catchwords that may have been exclusive to particular contexts (e.g. private spheres or specific fields of knowledge). Instances of the omission of content found in the manuscript originals are also brought up in footnotes. Still, the extent of the editorial work with the manuscript originals of, for example, the correspondence and its transcription is not clearly stated. The same is also true as regards the preservation of manuscripts.

A general overview of the contents of *al-Illighiyyāt* may be outlined as follows:

al-Illighiyyāt	Mudhakkirāt (memoirs)	Correspondence (incl. letter poems)	Poetry	Majālis (accounts)	No. of Pages
Part 1	162	54	39	20	275
Part 2	94	83	11	0	188
Part 3	25	231	0	0	256
Total	281	368	50	20	719

Table 1: Contents of *al-Illighiyyāt*

Contents of al-Illighiyyāt with approx. no. of edited page numbers, excl. front and back matter.

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[139] Patel (2013: x).
[140] R. al-Sūsī (2005: 487-488).
[141] al-Sūsī (2015, pt. 1: 3).

As the chart of the estimated contents of *al-Illighiyyāt* shows (see Table 1), the correspondence (*ca.* 368 edited pages) constitutes the major bulk of the contents when compared to other elements (*ca.* 350 edited pages). Arguably, therefore, letters and correspondence are a substantial and significant part of this work that supposedly reflects the exilic period of the author's life. Moreover, the mere integration of his correspondence into this work not only argues for the editorial view of their documentary and historical value, but also of their aesthetic and literary value, as we have also seen in the case of al-Shābbī's letters.

In part one of *al-Illighiyyāt*, in the very first entry, titled "*al-Nafī min Marrākush wa-asbābuh*" ('The Exile from Marrakech and its Causes'), al-Sūsī himself articulates the motivation for writing the book as follows:

كنت أحب أن أكتب في أسباب هذا النفي جزءًا خاصاً. بدأته بالفعل وحررت فيه
بعض صفحات ولكنني ألقيته ظهرياً لأشغال أخرى أهم. ولكن لخوف أن تضيع من
ذلك حقائق ينبغي أن لا تضيع بل يجب أن أسطرها للمستقبل. رأيت أن ألخص ذلك
هنا. فإنه حيث لا يتيسر تخصيص ذلك بجزء. فإن هذا الكتاب الذي نسميه منذ الآن
((الإلغيات)) أولى به من غيرها وليتمشى معي القارئ بتؤدة حتى أنفض إليه كل ما
أريد أن أنفضه إليه. وليعلم أنه يقرأ ما كتب تحت صدمة النفي من قلم غريب الفكر
والمسكن والبيئة. [142]

I initially wanted to write about the causes of this exile in a single volume [*juzʾ*] especially dedicated to it, and I indeed started on this project and even wrote a few pages of it. I nevertheless soon let it slide due to other, more pressing work. However, in fear that, in doing so, I would lose facts that ought to be preserved, or rather, that I ought to write down for the future, I decided to summarize the subject matter here. Since it was not possible to dedicate a whole volume to the subject, this book – which we from now on will call "Writings from Illigh" ["*al-Illighiyyāt*"] – will be as good as any for it. Thus, let the reader slowly walk with me in order that I may communicate to him all that I wish to communicate. Let him know that he is reading that which was written under the great shock of exile by the pen of a stranger [*gharīb*] of mindset, habitation, and milieu.

In the preface of *al-Illighiyyāt*, al-Sūsī furthermore explains that the intention behind the book and its varied contents was for it to function as an honest and unifying case for his memoirs and everything that occurred to him or presented

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[142] al-Sūsī (2015, pt. 1: 7).

itself to him during the period of his exile in Illigh,[143] be it letter poems of fraternity[144] or accounts of the different kinds of emotions and struggles experienced. It is also a book, he writes, the purpose of which is to reflect Illigh and what circulated in it of literature, discourses, and thoughts at that particular moment in time.[145]

4.2 The Sampling Procedure

With *al-Illighiyyāt* and *Rasāʾil al-Shābbī* as my source references, I conducted the sampling of private letters that would generate the letter-corpus that would become the subject of my analysis. The purpose of the sampling was to extract the largest and, if possible, the most regular private correspondence from each source reference, which in essence rendered this procedure both a quantitative and qualitative one. The threshold was set at a minimum of nine (sent) letters. The minimum threshold for letters was set with respect to the quantitative contents of each primary source reference. After this delimitation of the material, 144 modern letters from year 1929 to 1945 remained,[146] which came to constitute the letter-corpus that is subject to the analysis.

With regard to *Rasāʾil al-Shābbī*, this meant that both of its two correspondences were included in the corpus. That is, the correspondence between al-Ḥulaywī and al-Shābbī and the letters by al-Bashrūsh (sent to al--Ḥulaywī). For *al-Illighiyyāt*, this meant that three out of approximately 74 unique correspondences[147] emerged as the largest ones in the work: 1) "Conversations with the Master and Cousin Sidi Ibrāhīm ibn Aḥmad" (*Maʿa al-ustādh sīdī Ibrāhīm ibn Aḥmad ibn al-ʿamm*); 2) "Conversations with our Brother Moulay Aḥmad al-Manjrah" (*Maʿa al-akh mawlāy Aḥmad al-Manjrah*); and 3) "Correspondence with Sidi al-Ṭāhir ibn Muḥammad al-Īfrānī" (*Murāsalāt maʿa sīdī al-Ṭāhir ibn Muḥammad al-Īfrānī*). It might seem like many correspondences were left out with respect to *al-Illighiyyāt* (approximately 71 unique correspondences). However, one must keep in mind that many of these unique correspondences may be one

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[143] See al-Sūsī (2015, pt. 1: 3).

[144] Here, al-Sūsī uses the term *ikhwāniyyāt*. It is nonetheless clear by the text that he with this term refers to letters written only in verse, hence the wording 'letter poems' (see al-Sūsī [2015, pt. 1: 3]).

[145] al-Sūsī (2015, pt. 1: 3).

[146] Which corresponds approx. 300 edited pages (of which al-Shābbī: 179 pp. [96 letters]; al-Sūsī: 121 pp. [48 letters]).

[147] The approximate number of unique correspondences in each part are 30 (part 1), 13 (part 2), and 31 (part 3).

paragraph long, with some of them taking up only a quarter of the edited page or less. Moreover, many of these correspondences appear as one-time instances in the form of congratulatory letters (*tahānī*, sg. *tahniʾah*), letter poems, and occasionally, treatises that expound on a subject matter, such as the comparison between the urban and the desert life and the impacts of exile.[148] Thus, they do not immediately suggest the same interpersonal engagement as the three largest collections of correspondence that were extracted during the sample procedure.

4.2.1 A Mapping of the Modern Letter-Corpus

What follows is a summary of the primary material of this study. First, however, I would like to motivate my decision to also include the letters of al-Shābbī and al-Ḥulaywī's mutual friend, Muḥammad al-Bashrūsh, some qualitative considerations concerning the sampling of al-Sūsī's three correspondents, and the criteria through which I find it possible to study *Rasāʾil Shābbī* and *al-Illighiyyāt* side-by-side.

Although al-Bashrūsh's letters to al-Ḥulaywī appear in the appendix of the letter collection, and are not specifically addressed to al-Shābbī, I found that they discuss al-Shābbī as a mutual friend of theirs, and add to the thematics of the work as a whole. Thus, I consider it useful to also include the letters of al-Bashrūsh whenever they are relevant for the analysis.

As for the quantitatively based sampling procedure, through which al-Sūsī's correspondences with his cousin Ibrāhīm ibn Aḥmad, his close friend Aḥmad al-Manjrah, and his former teacher Shaykh al-Ṭāhir ibn Muḥammad al-Īfrānī emerged as the largest correspondences (with a minimum of nine sent letters each) in *al-Illighiyyāt*, a few words can also be said about the qualitative aspects of this particular sampling. While the intra-textual qualities and details of these correspondences will be dealt with at a later stage, one may suggest that the three correspondents represent three types of interpersonal relationships, namely: kinship and family relations (Ibn Aḥmad), friendship (al-Manjrah), and teacher-student relations (al-Īfrānī). These three types of interpersonal relationships, which lie at the basis of the respective correspondence, open up the possibility of the observance of both intra- and inter-individual features and variation.

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[148] See *al-Ajwibah al-ḥāḍirah al-bādiyah fī tafḍīl al-ḥāḍirah al-yawm li-mithlī ʿalá al-bādiyah* ('Ready Replies on the Present-Day City in Preference to the Desert for the Likes of Me') and *Nawāziʿ al-ghurbah* ('The Tendencies of Exile') in al-Sūsī (2015, pt. 2: 126-166; 168-190).

Moreover, one may rightfully question whether the selective sampling from *al-Illighiyyāt*, although quantitatively based, affects my reading and understanding of the work, in which case I would like to, once again, direct the attention to the generic nature of *al-Illighiyyāt*. While the work has been launched as a work of memoir (*mudhakkirāt*),[149] it shares – as has been mentioned previously – the characteristics of a literary collection (*majmūʿah adabiyyah*) and has been described by the author himself as a hodgepodge of a little of everything. This indicates that the work lends itself to a reading strategy different from that of, say, a conventional autobiography or novel, that is, the usual cover-to-cover reading. Thus, given the polyphonic nature of *al-Illighiyyāt*, the reader does not necessarily have to – and most definitely is not obliged to – read the work as unidimensional piece when, arguably, it is not.

As regards reading and analyzing *Rasāʾil al-Shābbī* by al-Ḥulaywī and *al-Illighiyyāt* by Muḥammad al-Mukhtār al-Sūsī in the same study, there are several things that make their juxtaposition interesting. Firstly, the central figures of these correspondences were contemporaries. Secondly, they all come from the same geo-political area, namely, the Greater Maghrib (*al-Maghrib al-Kabīr*). However, one finds two criteria in which the central figures of the correspondences were dissimilar. First, it can be said that they allegedly adhered to different schools of thought and literature. al-Shābbī and his circle of correspondents were part of the Modern Poets movement, or *de facture novatrice*, in the words of Jean Fontaine,[150] which is characterized by their sympathizers' aversion to the concurrent neo-classicist movement. The letters that are found in *Rasāʾil al-Shābbī* occasionally also manifest an aversion to and a critique of a particular kind of rigidity in religious thought found in some circles. They are assumed to be referring to the Salafists, whose reformist thought proliferated in Tunisia before other countries in the region.[151] On the other hand, although being of Sufi background and probably a loyal sympathizer, al-Sūsī, in contrast, eventually joined the modernist reformist movement of early Salafism (*al-salafiyyah*) that had its onset in late 19th century Egypt.

Besides these apparent differences in thought, we also find that that they – al-Shābbī and al-Sūsī, that is – generally differ in recognition, both regionally and

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[149] See the bibliographical article by Riḍá Allāh ʿAbd al-Wāfī al-Mukhtār al-Sūsī (ref: R. al-Sūsī [2015: 487-488]) and the front matter of the Dār al-Kutub al-ʿIlmiyyah edition (2015), which uses the classification (*al-taṣnīf*) *mudhakkirāt*, dubiously translated as 'biography.'

[150] See Fontaine (1999: 170-183).

[151] Bearman et al. (2012: keyword: "Salafiyya").

internationally, even when viewed on a diachronic level. However, the more widespread fame and reputation of the former does not diminish the importance and caliber of the latter. It is through precisely these aspects of similitude and dissimilitude that I allow myself to read their correspondence in a place of proximity. My task, therefore, is an explorative and comparative one that moves between two geographical areas at a given point in history with its case studies of specimens from what seems to be the long-standing art of letter writing.

Although a more detailed description of each correspondence in the modern letter-corpus can be found below (§ 4.3), one may summarize some of the major general features of the corpus in a few words. The first apparent common characteristic that strikes the reader is the dominant usage of unrhymed prose (*nathr*) and the common insertion of verse, both original and borrowed. In contrast to the pre-modern letter, the majority of these modern letters have been diligently dated according to either the Islamic calendar or the Gregorian calendar, which allows the day of the letter writing to be established. Moreover, it is common for the place of writing also to be specified. As regards the interpersonal relationships that lie at basis of the correspondences, they are all marked by a sense of intimacy, although this is of varying categories, namely friendship (al-Shābbī and al-Sūsī), kinship (al-Sūsī), and a teacher-student relationship (al-Sūsī).

Looking at it from a gender perspective, we find that all the transmitted correspondences in the two works of al-Ḥulaywī and al-Sūsī took place between male writers. Here, we may also recall the pre-modern generic term for unofficial or personal letters, *ikhwāniyyāt*, which suggests, in its apparent meaning of 'brotherly letters,' homosocial correspondence, and more specifically, correspondence between male letter writers. One can perhaps only speculate about how this might be the case. For example, if we were to adopt a more narrow definition of *ikhwāniyyāt* that places an emphasis on the notion of friendship and fraternity, as some theorists have done,[152] we may understand this tendency as a reflection of a general social and cultural norm that friendships ought to be homosocial in nature. I believe that it is quite safe to assume that these kinds of social and cultural norms that favor homosocial friendships stretch into modern times and are not necessarily restricted to the Arab culture either.

There is also the fundamental question of literacy, and which societal groups or classes had access to and could monopolize on the written word and which were

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[152] E.g. Hachmeier (2002: 141-142), Gully (2008: 14), and Bearman et al. (2012: keyword: "risāla"). For a more inclusive definition of the term, in contrast to official letters (*rasāʾil dīwāniyyah*), see Al-Musawi (2006: 111).

more restricted in these regards.[153] Thus, while women as a rule are almost never the addressees – except in the love letter – they may appear in the contents of the letter as, for example, referents or a theme. Looking into the modern era, this homosocial tendency in epistolary friendships still seems to be very strong.[154] Looking at some published correspondences in the 20th century, which is the time period relevant for the present study, the tendency could perhaps be partially explained by cultural and elitist environments that were male-dominated,[155] and which would quite naturally render their social networks and in extension their correspondence mainly homosocial. It could also be the case that female correspondents belonged to a private or domestic sphere, as in that of the home or the family, and that their correspondences, due to their private or domestic nature, were perhaps not deemed as fit for circulation and publication as those written by their male counterparts.

4.2.2 A Note on Representativity and Generalizability

The delimitation of the letter-corpus to include only a quite specific amount of modern private letters sampled from *Rasāʾil Shābbī* and *al-Illighiyyāt* admittedly affects the representativity of the material, both diachronically and synchronically, as well as cross-linguistically and cross-culturally. Having said that, this study emerges from the basic science of the Humanities and takes the form of an idiographic case study. The study is idiographic in that it tries to understand and interpret the specific and unique work and regards it as interesting and valid in its own right. Thus, I do not feel that the study is at odds with the greater paradigm of Humanistic research, which caters for the study of subjective and unique

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[153] For a nuanced study on the subject of literacy in Arabic speaking lands before the introduction of modern printing technology and the press, which commonly – however, not unquestionably – is regarded as the turning point in reading history, see Hirschler (2012).

[154] Of course, one does find exceptions, such as the previously mentioned collection *al-Shuʿlah al-zarqāʾ* ('The Blue Flame') (1984) that contains the private letters that Jibrān sent to Mayy Ziyādah, the latter's own epistolary art in *Mayy Ziyādah wa-aʿlām ʿaṣrihā: rasāʾil makhṭūṭah lam tunshar (1912-1930)* ('Mayy Ziyādah and the Notables of Her Time: Unpublished Letters [1912-1930]') (al-Kuzbarī [1982]), and the collection *Rasāʾil Ghassān Kanafānī ilá Ghādah al-Sammān* ('Ghassān Kanafānī's Letters to Ghādah al-Sammān') (2013 [1999]). It is interesting, however, that in the cases of both *al-Shuʿlah al-zarqāʾ* and *Rasāʾil Ghassān Kanafānī ilá Ghādah al-Sammān*, the letters by the female correspondents were either not included or not preserved for the potential purpose of publication. This is also true for *Rasāʾil al-sijn* ('Prison Letters') (al-Idrīsī [ed.] [2021]) that contains the letter that ʿAbd al-Qādir al-Shāwī wrote to Khanātah Bannūnah.

[155] Khaldi (2009: 26-27).

phenomena and gives voice to the idiographic dimension of, in this case, creative human expression (letter writing).

As with the case of most literary studies, the results and endeavors of the study are not generalizable nor necessarily reproducible, but they are comparable, in the sense that the results of the study lend themselves to further comparisons with the results of other studies of similar nature. Unfortunately, I have not been able to find research on the modern Arabic letter that would be useful for comparing results and saying something broader about modern Arabic letter writing from a literary viewpoint. Therefore, I hope that this study and its results can be used for future comparisons in order to establish more general literary features of the genre.

4.3 Synopses of the Correspondence

What follows below are brief synopses of each sampled correspondence. The reader will find a general description of the correspondence, tables showing the total amount of letters produced by each letter writer and their approximate number of edited pages, counting each page of commencement, as well as each correspondent's letter output per year. I have chosen to present these numbers in tables, since they are quite illustrative of the letter writers' personal engagement in their respective correspondence. Hence, as this is a first acquaintance with the correspondence, a more in-depth discussion on the formal and thematic content of the sampled letters is reserved for the upcoming main analysis.

4.3.1 The Letters of al-Shābbī and al-Ḥulaywī

Correspondence	No. of Letters Sent	Approx. No. of Edited Pages
al-Shābbī	34	83
al-Ḥulaywī	42	65
Total	76	148

Table 2: The Letters of al-Shābbī and al-Ḥulaywī

Number of letters sent and their approximate number of edited pages in the published edition.

Year	al-Shābbī	al-Ḥulaywī
1348/1929	6	4
1349/1930	4	6
1350/1931	1	1
1351/1932	9	9
1352/1933	9	12
1353/1934	5	10

Table 2.1: Letter Output per Year

The epistolarium *Rasāʾil al-Shābbī* covers a six-year-long correspondence between the two close friends al-Ḥulaywī and al-Shābbī (for letter output per year, see Table 2.1). Their correspondence begins with a letter dated "29 *muḥarram al-ḥarām sanat* 1348" (7 July 1929) written by al-Shābbī, and ends with a letter written by al-Ḥulaywī from Kairouan on 19 August 1934, no more than two months before the passing of al-Shābbī due to illness.

Three of the four previously listed reasons for the postponement of the publication of *Rasāʾil al-Shābbī*, as elaborated on by al-Ḥulaywī himself in the introduction to the work, are quite descriptive of the correspondence and a good summarization thereof.[156] In one aspect, the letters that were exchanged between al-Ḥulaywī and al-Shābbī reflect a close and intimate friendship in which the letter writers felt free to discuss both private and public matters, such as their personal mental health and their dislike for the conservative or traditionalist forces in Tunisia. Keeping in mind that the letter writers were in their early twenties during the correspondence, one may draw from the letters that they represent a formative time in their young adulthood. An air of rebelliousness, ardor, and existential angst distinguish this time of life, as reflected in the writers' letters. The personal and sensitive character of the letters is also affected by the fact that the writers mention and speak about contemporaries, both allies and adversaries.

The letters of al-Ḥulaywī and al-Shābbī are of varying length. As a general feature, a single letter may stretch from one to about four edited pages and is presented in well-balanced paragraphs. A typical letter opens up with a short addressation and greeting to the addressee, as in this example by al-Ḥulaywī: "My dearest brother, greetings and longings" (*akhī al-aʿazz, taḥiyyah wa-ashwāq*).[157] The letter writers may then proceed either directly to the subject matter or, if

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[156] al-Ḥulaywī (1966: 9-10). See above § 4.1.1.
[157] al-Ḥulaywī (1966: 41).

applicable, inform the other about a given circumstance, such an overdue response from the other or a change of location. At several points, al-Ḥulaywī opens up with a note to al-Shābbī that he has enclosed a piece of his writing in the letter, as in the following example: "Enclosed in this letter, you will find a small piece of that which I have written about Tolstoy" (*yaṣiluka ṭayya hādhā nabdhah mimmā katabtuhu ʿan Tūlstūy*).[158] Similarly, we may find in the postscript a short notice or reminder about a despatch or receipt of some sort, as in the example by al-Shābbī: "Following the Eid holiday, I sent to you a box of dates, but you have not notified me about it. I do not know what happened to it. Did it reach you or not?" (*kuntu wajjahtu ilayka ʿaqība ʿīd al-fiṭr ṣandūq daqlah wa-lam tukhbirnī ʿanhu fa-lam adri mādhā ṣanaʿa Allāh bi-hi? waṣalaka am lā?*).[159]

These elements of the letters that pertain to the more communicative and everyday themes of letter writing are not discussed in depth in the analysis, nor are they deemed primary or significant in relation to the rest of the content, but they do provide complementary information to the reader about what a letter from the correspondence may look like.[160]

4.3.2 The Letters of al-Bashrūsh

Correspondence	No. of Letters Sent	Approx. No. of Edited Pages
al-Bashrūsh	20	31

Table 3: The Letters of al-Bashrūsh

Number of letters sent and their approximate number of edited pages in the published edition.

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[158] al-Ḥulaywī (1966: 42). The article about Leo Tolstoy was published in the journal *al-ʿĀlam al-adabī* in 1930.

[159] al-Ḥulaywī (1966: 64).

[160] This comment is also true with regard to the remaining correspondence described below and will not be repeated.

Year	al-Bashrūsh
1351/1933	9
1352/1934	11

Table 3.1: Letter Output per Year

The appendix (*mulḥaq*) of *Rasāʾil al-Shābbī* exclusively contains the letters of al-Bashrūsh to al-Ḥulaywī and is titled *Rasāʾil al-Bashrūsh* ('al-Bashrūsh's Letters'). The correspondence begins with a letter sent from Nefta sometime in February 1933 and ends with an undated letter that seems to have been written shortly after the loss of their mutual friend al-Shābbī on 9 October 1934 (for letter output per year, see Table 3.1).

Although the appendix only contains the letters of al-Bashrūsh, it is evident from the contents of his letters that he received letters of response from al-Ḥulaywī. However, it seems that they both, every so often, were guilty of procrastination in terms of responding to each other's letters:

[...] وكتابة رسالة أمر هين لا تعب فيه ولا ارهاق ولكنى مثلك لست أدرى لماذا
كلما اردت أخذ القلم ضعفت وزهدت في القلم.¹⁶¹

> […] writing a letter is an easy task; there is no fatigue nor toil to it. Yet, I – just like you – do not know why every time I grab the pen I end up feeling feeble and thus abandon it.

The letters of al-Bashrūsh to al-Ḥulaywī speak a lot of his literary undertakings, readings, projects, and ideas, as if in a way of seeking feedback and reassurance from his friend, which is also a common feature of the correspondence between al-Ḥulaywī and al-Shābbī. As expected, the letters also brings up their mutual friend, al-Shābbī, and his illness, al-Bashrūsh's visits to him, the duties that come with friendship, and the ordeals of life and young adulthood in general.

On a more formal note, and similar to the rest of the letters in the collection, a typical letter by al-Bashrūsh opens with a short addressation, such as "my dearest brother" (*akhī al-aʿazz*)¹⁶² or "brother, my master" (*sayyidī* [coll. *sīdī*] *al-akh*).¹⁶³ In the same vein as the other correspondents, al-Bashrūsh typically moves on to

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¹⁶¹ al-Ḥulaywī (1966: 184).
¹⁶² al-Ḥulaywī (1966: 176).
¹⁶³ al-Ḥulaywī (1966: 178). Here, "master" (or "sir") (*sayyidī*, or coll. *sīdī*) is used as an honorific for an elder brother.

confirm his receipt of al-Ḥulaywī's letter or acknowledges his friend's long wait for a letter of response. In contrast to the other correspondents in the letter collection, al-Bashrūsh is not as keen to use postscripts, to which he only occasionally resorts to briefly inform about a return to work or a visit to al-Shābbī, or about his health condition.[164]

The letters of al-Bashrūsh are generally somewhat shorter than the ones written by al-Ḥulaywī and al-Shābbī. While his letters range between one and four edited pages, they are typically between one and two edited pages long and are arranged in well-balanced paragraphs. Perhaps not surprisingly, the longest letter is the last one in the correspondence, which he wrote upon the death of their mutual friend al-Shābbī.[165]

4.3.3 The Letters of al-Sūsī and Ibrāhīm ibn Aḥmad

Correspondence	No. of Letters Sent	Approx. No. of Edited Pages
al-Sūsī	13	32
Ibn Aḥmad	1	3
Total	14	35

Table 4: The Letters of al-Sūsī and Ibrāhīm ibn Aḥmad

Number of letters sent and their approximate number of edited pages in the published edition.

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[164]   al-Ḥulaywī (1966: 173, 187, 189, 191).
[165]   al-Ḥulaywī (1966: 197-200).

Year	al-Sūsī	Ibn Aḥmad
1356/1937	5	0
1357/1938	1	0
1358/1939	0	0
1359/1940	1	1
1360/1941	1	0
1361/1942	0	0
1362/1943	1	0
1363/1944	1	0
1364/1945	3	0

Table 4.1: Letter Output per Year

As indicated by the tables (Table 4 and Table 4.1), and as is presented in *al-Illighiyyāt*, the correspondence that took place between al-Sūsī and his cousin Ibrāhīm ibn Aḥmad had an obviously disproportionate engagement between the two parties. The first, and only, letter from Ibn Aḥmad to be sent as part of the correspondence is dated "1359 – 12 [*dhū al-ḥijjah*] – 18" (*ca.* 17 January 1941), that is, about three years after al-Sūsī's initiatory letter, which he wrote in the winter of 1937 (refer to Table 4.1). However, in three undated letters it is clearly implied that al-Sūsī received at least three additional letters from Ibn Aḥmad prior to that single letter.[166] Nonetheless, the epistolary engagement remains lopsided.

As the table (Table 4.1) further shows, al-Sūsī responds to his cousin's letter, and continues to send him letters, only to wait in vain for any response from Ibn Aḥmad for the remaining five years of the correspondence. In fact, during the whole year of 1942 no letter is transmitted from either one of the correspondents. This seems to indicate al-Sūsī's discontent with Ibn Aḥmad's lack of reciprocity and apparent disinterest in keeping the correspondence alive.

Naturally, one might say, this unbalanced commitment to writing letters colored both the contents and the interpersonal tone of the letters, fluctuating between registers of the emotional states of longing, agony, and outright annoyance and disappointment. All of this is in addition to al-Sūsī's obvious need to convey his state of affairs and thoughts on the exile and the happenings and circumstances that led up to it. Thus, the correspondence is a clear example of how jeopardizing the either tacit or explicit agreement on the level of engagement,

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[166] Refer to letter No. 2, letter No. 5, and letter No. 14 in al-Sūsī (2015, pt. 2: 212-213, 220-222).

which is part and parcel of the epistolary pact, affects the thematic and stylistic turns of the letters.

Concerning the formal aspects of the correspondence, the letters are of varying length, ranging between two and seven edited pages, and typically appear as dense text filling most of the edited page, with a sparse usage of paragraphs. Generally, the letters between al-Sūsī and Ibn Aḥmad do not open up with formal greetings,[167] but when they do, they do so with a typical greeting, such as "peace and blessings be upon you" (*wa-al-salām ʿalaykum wa-raḥmat Allāh*).[168] Instead, the letters may begin with a verse of poetry or, often, a conveyance of longing or disappointment. Thus, the letters of this correspondence are often characterized by directness, as in the openings of the following two letters by al-Sūsī: "I am writing to you now, as I sit in this upper room that I have gotten accustomed to seeking refuge in since nine months ago" (*innanī aktubu ilayka al-āna; wa-anā fī hādhihi al-ʿulliyah allatī aliftu an āwī ilayhā mundhu tisʿat ashhur*) and "You have indeed become very fond of idleness and stagnation" (*laqad raʾimta al-khumūl. wa-alifta al-rukūd*).[169]

Another typical feature of a letter in this correspondence is its closure, with an intimate conveyance of greetings to and from family and peers, for example: "Kiss from me the son of Ibn Dāwud[170] and greet, on my behalf, everyone who asks [about me]" (*fa-qabbil ʿannī walad Ibn Dāwud. wa-ṣāfiḥ ʿannī kull man yasʾal*) and "ʿAbd Allāh and Saʿīd send their greetings to you" (*wa-ʿAbd Allāh wa-Saʿīd yusallimāni ʿalaykum*).[171] Despite Ibn Aḥmad's lack of reciprocity in letter writing, and al-Sūsī's displeasure about it, the correspondence is marked by expressions of concern for the other and their affairs.

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[167] It is possible that most of the formalities of greetings were omitted in the transcription of the letters into *al-Illighiyyāt*.

[168] al-Sūsī (2015, pt. 2: 212).

[169] al-Sūsī (2015, pt. 2.: 213, 237)

[170] A mutual friend and brother in law of Ibn Aḥmad.

[171] al-Sūsī (2015, pt. 2.: 238, 242).

4.3.4 The Letters of al-Sūsī and Aḥmad al-Manjrah

Correspondence	No. of Letters Sent	Approx. No. of Edited Pages
al-Sūsī	10	24
al-Manjrah	4	4
Total	14	28

Table 5: The Letters of al-Sūsī and Aḥmad al-Manjrah

Number of letters sent and their approximate number of edited pages in the published edition.

Year	al-Sūsī	al-Manjrah
1357/1938	3	3
1358/1939	0	0
1359/1940	3	1
1360/1941	0	0
1361/1942	3	0
1364/1945	1	0

Table 5.1: Letter Output per Year

The majority of letters that were exchanged between al-Sūsī and Aḥmad al-Manjrah revolve around declarations of fraternal love and longing, in both prose and (borrowed and original) poetry, as well as updates on the affairs of their mutual "brothers" (*al-ikhwān*) in Marrakech.

The section in *al-Illighiyyāt* dedicated to the correspondence between the two friends opens up with a letter dated "24 – 1 [*muḥarram*] - 1358" (16 March 1939) from al-Manjrah and ends with a letter from al-Sūsī sent at the end of the year 1361AH (end of 1942/beginning of 1943) (see Table 5.1). However, in this section, one finds what seems to be an even earlier letter from al-Sūsī in the form of a poem dated "26 – 7 [*rajab*] - 1357" (22 September 1938). Thus, the correspondence extends over a period of roughly 4.5 years with a meager average of about 2.5 letters exchanged per year. Moreover, al-Sūsī's letters represent about 75 percent of the total output.

Judging from the correspondence as presented in *al-Illighiyyāt*, we find that most letters (6) were exchanged in the year 1357/1938, while a total break took place in the years 1939 and 1941 (see Table 5.1). The correspondence was later resumed on 17 February 1942 (17 Muḥarram 1361) on the initiative of al-Sūsī. In fact, all the three letters that were sent that year were written by al-Sūsī. Moreover, there is also a short excerpt from a lost letter written by al-Sūsī, dated "4 – 5 [*jumādá al-awwal*] – 1364" (17 April 1945) that has been included in the mapping of the correspondence, and which consists of five verses of poetry that al-Sūsī says were composed extemporarily:[172]

<div dir="rtl">

أبعد بني الحق الصراح مرام   وتحلو بذوق الشاربين مدام

فكيف يطيب العيش من دون وصلهم   لمثلي ويحلو لي لدى مقام

يراد سلو القلب عنهم ودون ما   يريد العذول يستطاب حمام

هم كل من أبغي فإن فات نيلهم   - ولا فات - فالدنيا عليّ حرام

عليهم من أعماق قلبي تحية   معطرة أنفاسها وسلام

</div>

Is there after the people of the clear truth any further wish?

Would any wine be sweet to the taste of drinkers after being with them?

How can I taste the sweetness of living without uniting with them in love?

How can any place ever become pleasant to me?

He who blames our relationship (out of jealousy) wishes our heart to forget them,

but for us, the fate of death would be sweeter before realizing his wish.

They are all that I desire; if their attainment escapes me (and God forbid that this attainment escapes me),

then, the world will become forbidden to me

From the bottom of my heart, upon them be –

sweetly fragrant salutations and greetings

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172 al-Sūsī (2015, pt. 3: 115).

The above five verses are highly illustrative of the philiatic and, at times, almost psychologically profound nature of the letters that were exchanged between al-Sūsī and al-Manjrah. The major topoi found in the letters hinge on mental processes, such as dreaming, remembrance, and imagining (or daydreaming), primarily through references without elaboration on their content.

Formally, the letters of this correspondence range from two to ten edited pages of dense text. However, the typical letter is about two edited pages long, with an exceptional letter by al-Sūsī of ten edited pages that is infused with verses of borrowed and original poetry.[173] Similar to the correspondence between al-Sūsī and his cousin Ibn Aḥmad, one also typically finds general inquiries about the wellbeing of family and peers and conveyances of greetings, as in these examples by al-Sūsī and al-Manjrah respectively: "How are your children? How are your merchant friends?" (*kayfa al-awlād wa-kayfa aṣḥābuka al-tijāriyyūn*) and "My father always prays for you" (*wa-wālidī yadʿū laka dāʾiman*).[174] Thus, in several respects, the correspondences that al-Sūsī had with his friend al-Manjrah and his cousin Ibn Aḥmad share the same air of familiarity and intimacy.

4.3.5 The Letters of al-Sūsī and al-Ṭāhir ibn Muḥammad al-Īfrānī

Correspondence	No. of Letters Sent	Approx. No. of Edited Pages
al-Sūsī	10	28
al-Īfrānī	10	30
Total	20	58

Table 6: The Letters of al-Sūsī and al-Ṭāhir ibn Muḥammad al-Īfrānī

Number of letters sent and their approximate number of edited pages in the published edition.

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[173] al-Sūsī (2015, pt. 3: 116-125). Referred to in "Masculine Performances and Self-Making" (§ 7.1.4).

[174] al-Sūsī (2015, pt. 3: 116, 136).

Year	al-Sūsī	al-Īfrānī
1360/1942	1	1
1361/1943	3	3
1362/1944	2	2
1363-4/1945	4	4

Table 6.1: Letter Output per Year

Out of all of al-Sūsī's three sampled correspondences, the one that took place between him and his former teacher al-Ṭāhir ibn Muḥammad al-Īfrānī is the most balanced correspondence in terms of epistolary engagement, reciprocity, and turn-taking (see Tables 6 and 6.1).

The section in *al-Illighiyyāt* that is dedicated to their correspondence opens up with a congratulatory letter from al-Īfrānī, written at the end of the year 1369AH (January 1942), on the government granting al-Sūsī free movement in the whole of the Sūs region. Their correspondence ends with a letter from al-Īfrānī in the form of a reply to al-Sūsī's answer to his own *mudhākarah*[175] that he had posed to al-Sūsī (for letter output per year, see Table 6.1).

As one might expect from the correspondence between a scholar and his former teacher, the letters often revolve around the subject of knowledge, its virtues, and its devotees. In dealing with scholastic issues, such as matters pertaining to Islamic jurisprudence, the *mudhākarah* is a prime example thereof.[176] However, the contents of the letters are also very intimate in nature, conveying greetings, good wishes, and praise, as well as feelings of longing and a bond that can be likened to that which may exist between a father and his son.

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[175] *Mudhākarah*, from the verb *dhākara* (stem form: III; *fāʿala*), 'he called to mind [s.th. with s.o.]; he conferred [about s.th. with s.o.].' In this context, *mudhākarah* seems to refer to the act of discussing a subject matter with another person or a group (refer to Lane [1864: keyword: "dhakara"]). The term is also used, within the context of traditional learning, as a method of memorization, that is, the reciprocal activity of helping one another to memorize something, such as a written record (e.g. Ḥadīth reports and chains of transmission) (Hallaq [2016: 362]; Sobieroj [2016: 84]). Also, in *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, it is mentioned that within the specific context of the Yashruṭiyyah branch of the Shādhiliyyah order, the term *mudhākarah* refers to a lesson on the Quran and the Sufi path itself (Bearman et al. [2012: keyword: "mudhākara"]). However, I am less sure that this particular technical usage of the term cannot be found within other branches of the Shādhiliyyah order and, perhaps, even outside of it and at earlier points in the history of Sufi thought and praxis.

[176] al-Sūsī (2015, pt. 3: 56-73). Here, the discussion revolves around the issue of imposing capital punishment on the person who leaves the prescribed prayer out of sloth or laziness. al-Sūsī argues that there is no sound religious proof for imposing the capital punishment.

With the exception of the quite lengthy *mudhākarah*, the letters range between two and six edited pages of dense text with an average of around three edited pages. In contrast to the other sampled correspondences from *al-Illighiyyāt*, the initiatory addressations and greetings in this correspondence are generally more elaborate, as in the example by al-Īfrānī : "The most pleasant and fragrant greeting, and the most sweeping and bountiful, to you, my devoted son. The son who never once has failed after he has gladdened" (*aṭyab al-salām wa-aʿṭaruh. wa-aʿammuhu wa-aghzaruhu ʿalá siyādat al-walad al-barr. wa-al-ibn alladhī mā sāʾa qaṭṭu baʿda mā sarr*).[177]

Although the expressions and vocabulary used may, at times, appear as quite ceremonial and perhaps even archaic to a modern Arabic speaking reader, these characteristics of their correspondence may well allow it to be read in the light of the pre-modern art of letter writing, the style and register of which clearly resonates in the letters. However, these are matters reserved for the analysis.

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[177] al-Sūsī (2015, pt. 3: 28).

5. Theoretical Framework and Method of Analysis

This study demonstrates a literary approach to the modern Arabic letter texts, as opposed to the commonly adopted ethnographic, historical, or sociological approach to letters – regardless of their geographical origin – within modern research. The Arabic letter text's aesthetic autonomy and expression of some kind of literary genius are two evident implications of this kind of study. Hence, while we have recognized that epistolaria and letters of modern Arabic speaking writers have been published,[178] studies that employ a reading of such works from a literary perspective of this kind have, to the best of my knowledge, not been conducted before.

5.1 "Unnatural" Letters and the Epistolary Pact

> Letters are as much fictional constructions as they are transparent reflections. Letter writers do not merely reproduce the sentiments they feel and the events they observe; they transform them, whether consciously or unconsciously, into written texts whose organization, style, vocabulary, and point of view generate particular meanings. Since both "real" and "fictional" letters are at least to some extent mediated constructions, authentic letters cannot necessarily be rejected as non-literary, and the distinction between real and fictional texts begins to break down. Any correspondence, any written text, in fact, may be given a literary reading.[179]

While there is an important aspect of referentiality that is different from that in purely fictive letters, it may be argued that "real" letters are as much literary constructs as fictive letters, seeing that the epistolarium (the letter collection), as a creation, does not represent the ur-letters. Furthermore, the letters themselves may employ various literary devices and modes, and they undoubtedly transform and (re)construct the world and the relationships therein. Thus, I am working from the premise of an existing diegesis (*diégèse*),[180] together with

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[178] See footnote 11 and "Early Modern and Modern Forms" (§ 3.2).

[179] MacArthur (1990: 118).

[180] Here, the French term *diégèse* is not to be confused with the Greek word *diegesis*. Neither is the term to be confused with story (*histoire*). Instead, *diégèse* is better understood as the spatio-temporal universe in which the story (train of events) occurs. By contrast, the Greek

"world-representative"[181] material, which will aid me in construing the literary craft of narration, depiction, and characterization. As I will suggest below,[182] the use of narratological inquiries opens up to possible ways to analyze the epistolary personae (characters), their constellations, and the story emanating from the epistolary universe.

   This study relies on the theoretical work of Liz Stanley, Janet Gurkin Altman, Elizabeth Jane MacArthur, Helen Dampier, and Margaretta Jolly.[183] Recent theorizations of life narratives within the field of life writing have also played a major role in setting the theoretical foundations of the present study. Dealing with matters of the fragmented self, the creative and fickle work of memory, the experience of selfhood, and the existential imperative to speak or write about the self, a postmodern understanding of life narratives – that includes letters – has problematized and questioned what for a long time has generally been taken for granted concerning referentiality, truth, and the unified subject in relation to such work.[184] Over the last three decades, there has also been an increasing interest in the textual, rhetorical and performative dimensions to letters and their world-representative properties.[185] Further pushing the challenge posed by the textual turn concerning the factuality of the information found in letters, and the referentiality of their contents, Liz Stanley asserts that:

> [a]s a part of the increased concern with textuality, greater attention has also been given to the ways that letters in a correspondence construct, not just reflect, a

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   word *diegesis* refers back to the Platonic theory of the modes of representation, in which *diegesis* is compared with *mimesis*: that is, *diegesis* being the "pure" narrative that is deprived of dialog, while *mimesis* is the "impure" or "mixed" narrative that is related to the mimetic nature of dramatic representation, to which dialogs, amongst other things, belong. Also, note that, in English, the French word and the Greek word are compensated for by the use of a single English term, namely, diegesis, and this is why a definition of the term used is necessary to avoid any misconception. Refer to Genette (1988: 17-18).

[181] Here, "world-representative" is not measured against a notion of "realism" nor of extra-textual truths; rather it is the kind of world evoked by language that fills the diegesis, and that may be more or less "realistic" or "true."

[182] "Narratological and Stylistic Inquiries" (§ 5.2).

[183] See, for example, *Epistolarity* (1982) by Altman, *Extravagant narratives* (1990) by MacArthur, "The Epistolarium" (2004) by Stanley, "Letters as/not a genre" (2005) by Jolly and Stanley, and "She Wrote Peter Halkett: Fictive and Factive Devices" (2008) by Stanley and Dampier.

[184] See, for example, Eakin (2008), Smith and Watson (2010), and Scott (2012).

[185] Stanley (2004: 202-203, 211).

> relationship, develop a discourse for articulating this, and can have a complex relationship to the strictly referential.[186]

Thus, we recognize that letters and correspondences engage in a construction and maintenance of a discursive "world" and the relationships that form and develop therein. We can therefore also speak of an epistolary character or version of the self that is constructed by the letter writer themselves, a "persona" that equally lends itself to textual scrutiny.[187]

Taking all of the above textual matters into consideration, one must analytically approach the letter text with a sensitivity to the epistemological and ontological questions it poses. In fact, as argued by Stanley, "paradox is at the heart of epistolary matters."[188] The paradox that purportedly lies in these dialogical and perspectival dimensions of the letter pertains to several aspects, such as the letter's "message" in relation to its generally elliptical nature, a simulacrum of the writer only in their absence by containing some of their qualities or characteristics (e.g. typical expressions or mistakes, stains, and the hand-folded paper), the construction of a "world" and persona while safeguarding its own referentiality, and temporality through an interpolated narration.

The above aspects of the letter's paradoxical quality ties in with the key properties of the epistolary pact, as formulated by Andrea Salter, Stanley, and Dampier:[189]

- **Relationality:** Letters can be regarded as an autobiographical form that takes on a strong "I-to-and-from-You" relational mode, rather than a dominant "I writing" one.[190] Thus, this aspect of the epistolary pact, and what Altman has dubbed "the weight of the reader,"[191] signifies the inclusion also of the "You" as an important and active presence, not only as the addressee and reader, but also as a potential writer and "co-author" of the larger epistolary text. Indeed, according to theorists, this aspect of the epistolary problematizes Philippe Lejeune's emphatic stress on the

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[186] Stanley (2004: 211). Cf. Stanley et al. (2012: 269, 273)
[187] Cf. MacArthur (119).
[188] Stanley (2004: 214). Cf. Altman (1982: 187-188).
[189] Aspects of the epistolary pact are explicitly discussed in the analysis in "The Setting, the Action, the Writer, and the Writing" (§ 7.1.1).
[190] Stanley et. al. (2012: 279).
[191] Altman (1982: 87-116).

centrality of the "I," as the author, narrator, and protagonist, at the expense of the agentic and, possibly, responsive reader.[192]

- **Referentiality:** Letters undeniably have material as well as social referents that include places, events, people, and states of affairs, which all comprise an extra-textual world that is contingent on the subjective interpretation of the "I," and which, naturally, is open to perspectival disagreements between the "I" and the "You." This quite evident referential aspect of the epistolary has caused theorists to oppose a purely textual approach to letters that does not take into account the material and social contexts in which they were written and exchanged, nor the effects of the contextual on the meaning of the letter text.[193] Hence why referentiality remains a core aspect of the epistolary pact.

- **Temporality:** It is argued that the formalist terms in which the letter is to be regarded as an autobiographical form ought to call attention to the aspect of temporality and recognize it as an important constituent of the epistolary pact.[194] Characterized by what has been termed as an "interpolated narrating,"[195] the temporality of letters is heavily dependent on the "here-and-now" moment of writing and the temporal remove – however short – between the "now" and the event written about.

- **Reciprocity:** In every correspondence, there is an agreement – which may be explicitly stated or tacitly taken for granted – about what types and levels of engagement to expect from each correspondent in terms of, for example, quickness in providing a response, frequency of writing, the appropriate length of each letter, and equal turn-taking.

Stanley, Salter, and Dampier's definition of the epistolary pact may be compared to Altman's elaboration on the six so-called polar dimensions of the letter,[196] from which the former theorists appear to have developed much of their conceptualization of the epistolary. In addition, the polarities identified by Altman

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[192] Stanley et al. (2012: 278).
[193] Stanley et al. (2012: 280).
[194] Stanley et al. (2012: 278).
[195] That is, a complex type of narrating that combines a subsequent and simultaneous narration, a "between the moments of action" narration marked by a quasi-interior monolog and an after-the-event account (Genette 1980: 217-218).
[196] Altman (1982: 187-188).

also further emphasize the paradoxes that surround letters and correspondences; they may be outlined as follows:[197]

- **Bridge/Barrier:** A letter can function as both a "distance breaker" and a "distance maker." By employing appropriate narrative measures, the letter writers can either make their letters call attention to alienation or disaffection (intercessory function), unwillingly or willingly act as the only means of communication between two or more parties (mediatory function), or negotiate, or intervene, between intimacy and disinterest or even enmity (intermediary function).
- ***Confiance/non-confiance*:** "If the winning and losing of *confiance* [trust] constitute part of the narrative content, the related oppositions *confiance / coquetterie* (or candor / dissimulation) and *amitié / amour* [friendship/love] represent the two primary types of epistolary style and relationship."[198] Of course, in practice, the boundaries between these oppositions may not be as harsh or as clear-cut, for they may also fluctuate and, at times, become obscure. The dichotomy *confiance/non-confiance* (trust/mistrust) aims to grasp the potential of the letter to be both transparent and obscure, that is, both a "portrait of the soul" and a "mask," or both a "confession" and a "weapon."
- **Writer/Reader:** The polar dimension of writer and reader signifies the way in which letter writers can change back and forth between the roles of the narrator and narratee, encoder and decoder, writer and reader – usually within one single letter. Thus, while we often think of letters as "private," the epistolary often calls for an audience, an addressee, that *post hoc* may also involve third parties, both legitimate and illegitimate ones.
- **I/You, Here/There, Now/Then:** Again, letters are fundamentally dependent on reciprocity and their temporality is marked by interpolation. According to Altman, letter writers create an illusion of the present (the

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[197] Polar dimensions of the letter texts are explicitly discussed in the analysis in § 7.1.1 and § 7.2.2 and § 7.2.3 as well as *en passant* in the third to last paragraph of "Poetry as Speech Representation and a Part of the Epistolary Narrative" (§ 7.1.3).

[198] Altman (1982: 186). I disagree with Altman's translation of *confiance* as 'candor'; however, it may understood as 'trust [whereby candor is a logical consequence],' which is more plausible. I also have some contentions with translating *coquetterie* as 'dissimulation' without any further explanation. In this context, I understand *coquetterie* as a concern with appearance or, more likely, conceit, in the sense of ingenious expression. This will become apparent in § 7.2.2 and § 7.2.3.

[198] Altman (1982: 186).

"now") by alternating between the "then(s)" of the past and the "then(s)" of the future, which ties in with the possible distance breaking mechanisms of the letter in both spatial and temporal terms.

- **Closure/Overture:** Letter writing inevitably implies either a discontinuation or a continuation of exchange. Each single letter has the potential to be the last one in the chain of communication, and this for many possible reasons, such as the return of or reunion with the addressee, the death of one of the correspondents, or the disinterest or rejection of one of the writing parties. However, each letter is equally able to be open-ended, leaving room for the continuation of the communication.
- **Unit/Unity:** A letter can be regarded as being, at the same time, both an independent or self-contained unity and a unit of a greater constellation, that is, the correspondence as a whole. This duality makes the letter "an apt instrument for fragmentary, elliptical writing and juxtaposition of contrasting discrete units,"[199] a form that in and of itself invites the letter writers to create or simulate a kind of narrative coherence and consistency.

Undeniably, the epistolary pact also demonstrates the ways in which the letter cannot be limited to the letter writer and the addressee, the "I-and-You" constellation. This, since we ought to recognize that letters

> are routinely if not invariably multifocal, involving the writer/reader, the reader/writer, legitimate and illegitimate third parties, and, in the case of "collected" and published autobiographies and letters, this reciprocality also includes the researcher-editor, and the readers of the published versions.[200]

With regard to the epistolarium, one may single out three distinct ways of thinking about such a production:[201] 1) A record of letters that is open for *post hoc* studies; 2) An accumulation of a particular letter writer's existent letters and correspondence; 3) The editorial transcription and production and publishing of "ur-letters," or rather, versions of them. It is mainly the third perspective that is of concern for us here,[202] since it presents a fundamental way of thinking about the epistolarium, or letter collection, as a creative creation, usually made by a third party.

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[199] Altman (1982: 187).
[200] Stanley et al. (2012: 281).
[201] Stanley (2004: 218).
[202] Refer to Stanley (2004: 221-223).

On that note, however, one may recognize that the published letters that were sampled for the present study were compiled and transcribed by a second party, rather than a third one, considering that two individuals from the total of those who engaged in the correspondence took upon themselves this task. According to this third perspective, one takes into account the creative processes through which manuscripts of letters – that is, ur-letters – are taken out from the private sphere into the public view and the issues of representation and editorial transparency that such a process would entail.

5.2 Narratological and Stylistic Inquiries

The above theorizations of "real" letters and correspondences indeed illustrates some of the different formal perspectives from which one can study and appreciate the epistolary and deal with its epistemological and ontological issues. The components of the epistolary pact, the polar dimensions of letters, and the epistolarium as a *post hoc* creation, all form the paradigm of the present study, from within which we will accredit letters, and more specifically published letters, their complex artistic value, creative ability, and artifice.

Taking the published letter and epistolarium as our main point of departure, one may recall Grace Paley's notion of "the story-teller's pain,"[203] recognizing that there is a story that is wanting, and being, told by its mere enunciation and coming into being. This pressing "story" that pains the narrator may or may not have been intended for the public eye (or ear), but it is nevertheless there, unfolding itself, in each single letter and in the larger epistolary constellation of which it is an integral part.

In the case of the correspondences that are relevant for this study, it is quite clear that the letter writers – or at least some of them (al-Sūsī and al-Shābbī and his two friends) – could envision the possibility of their letters being published at some point in the future already at the time of writing them. In a letter sent from Tozeur dated "1351 *shawwāl* 28" (24 February 1933), al-Ḥulaywī writes to al-Shābbī about an encounter with their mutual friend al-Bashrūsh that is quite telling for the fate of their correspondence:

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[203] "Some knowledge was creating a real physical pressure, probably in the middle of my chest – maybe just to the right of my heart. I was beginning to suffer the storyteller's pain: Listen! I *have* to tell you something!" (Paley, 2007: ix, cursive in the original).

لقد مر بى أمس حضرة الاخ البشروش فى طريقه الى صفاقس لامضاء امتحان
الترسيم وقد سلم الى رسالته اليك وقصيدة اللذين يصلانك صبحة هذا. وقد رغب الى
أن أقول لك انه يرغب أن نطلع بعضنا على رسائلنا التى نتبادلها حتى تكون هاته
الرسائل بمثابة صحف خاصة. بحيث أننى أطلعه على رسائلك التى ترد الى ويطلعني
كذالك ونطلع نحن على رسائلنا المتبادلة. وبناء على ذلك سلم إلى رسالتك لأطلع
عليها. وقد أضاف الى قوله المتقدم: انها ربما يأتى عليها اليوم الذى تنشر فيه على
الناس كما يفعل ذلك أدباء الغرب في كثير من الأحيان.²⁰⁴

> Yesterday, our respected brother al-Bashrūsh passed me by on his way to Sfax to
> partake in the audience for public office. He handed me his letter to you and a
> poem that will both have reached you by this morning. He wanted me to tell you
> that he wishes some of us to read the letters that we exchange so that they may
> be like private journals [*suḥuf khāṣṣah*],[205] since I show him the letters that you
> send to me, and he shows me his too, and we read each other's exchanged letters.
> So accordingly, he gave me his letter to you for me to read it. To this, he also
> added: Perhaps there will come a day when they will be published for the public,
> just as many of the Western litterateurs every so often have done [with their
> letters].

Similarly, in a letter written in Jumādá al-Awwal 1356AH (*ca.* July 1937), al-Sūsī
writes to his cousin Ibrāhīm ibn Aḥmad: "I would also like to sternly remind you
to keep every single letter, since I might compile them at some point in the
future."[206] Other possible indicators of al-Sūsī's consciousness of the likelihood of
his correspondence being published are the nearly secretive ellipses found in his
letters to Aḥmad al-Manjrah, by which meanings and things referred to become
obscure or cryptic. However, one cannot dismiss the possibility of the ellipses
being a way of safeguarding the message from illegitimate readers and, admittedly,
it is quite clear that some of them appeared at a later stage during the editorial work
of *al-Illighiyyāt*. One such example is found in a letter dated "1359 *shaʿbān* 21"
(24 September 1940), when al-Sūsī writes to al-Manjrah: "I wish that I could
elaborate. I wish that I could write with the kind of expression that deserves to
carry my thoughts that… however… and do I live only for words to escape from
my expressions, but…" (*bi-wuddī an law uṭīl. wa-bi-wuddī an law amkana lī an*

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²⁰⁴ al-Ḥulaywī (1966: 105).
²⁰⁵ *Ṣuḥuf khāṣṣah*, here translated as 'private journals,' could be an allusion to the *journal
intime* genre that emerged in France during the 19th century (France, 2005).
²⁰⁶ al-Sūsī (2015, pt. 2: 213).

aktuba bi-al-ʿibārah allatī tastaḥiqqu an taḥmila afkārī allatī…wa-lākin…wa-hal naʿīshu ḥattá tabtaʿida min ʿibārātī kalimah lākin…)[207] In the following example, from an undated letter of response written at the end of the year 1361AH (the winter of 1942), it may be difficult to determine whether the ellipsis is due to the perceived redundancy of the content or because of its confidentiality: "And may the peace, mercy, and blessings of God be upon you, father of al-Ghālī and al-Ghāzī [i.e. Aḥmad al-Manjrah]! And upon Māriyah and Laṭīfah, and…."[208] However, other instances of cryptic or elliptical writing seem to have been there from the very beginning, such as when al-Sūsī, in the above mentioned letter from 21 Shaʿbān 1359AH, also writes:

وأقول: ليت شعري: كيف تطلع علينا شمس الغد. وما هو حظنا في المستقبل. فهل يمكن لنا يوماً ما أن نجول في الأسواق التجارية كما نريد وأنت تدري المقصود بهذه الأسواق.[209]

> Thus, I say: I wish I knew! How the sun will rise upon us tomorrow, and what our lot in the future will be. Will it be possible for us to roam freely in the business markets, as we like? And you know what is meant by these "markets."

Also, in another letter dated "1359 *rajab* 25" (29 August 1940), upon informing al-Manjrah of the arrival of a parcel personally delivered to him:

توصلت بكل ما جاءني في أول هذه السنة [...] كما توصلت بكل ما جاء مع الحلواء. وكما توصلت أخيراً بما جاء على يد سالم ولا أحتاج إلا ذكر ذلك تفصيلاً.[210]

> At the beginning of this year, I received all of that which has been sent to me […] I also received all of the confections, and I have finally received that which was delivered to me through Sālim, which I do not need to write about in detail.

Of course, it is difficult to assess the degree to which this consciousness of the possibility of one's private letters one day being published – however vague or uncertain it might have been at the time of writing – may have affected the style and content of the letters, and, by extension, their meaning. We might never know with certainty whether the letters would have looked remarkably different had the

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207 al-Sūsī (2015, pt. 3: 131).
208 al-Sūsī (2015, pt. 3: 135).
209 al-Sūsī (2015, pt. 3: 129).
210 al-Sūsī (2015, pt. 3: 126).

thought of publishing them never crossed the minds of the writers. Yet the mere fact that the ur-letters were sampled together, transcribed, edited, and placed between the two covers of a book in a certain arrangement, allows us not only to appreciate the unique qualities that make up epistolary discourse as such, but also prompts us to study the letters as a creative and highly "unnatural" representation, or version, of the "real" historical correspondence that is out of our reach.

Gérard Genette, H. Porter Abbott, and Tilda Maria Forselius are among those theorists who recognize the particular value of the writing action in non-retrospective forms, such as the letter and the diary.[211] The interpolated quality of the narration found in letters, that is, a kind of narration that takes place between the moments of action, allows the entanglement of the narrating (the writing) and the story, and allows the former to have an effect on the latter.[212] Thus, the letter not only mediates the narrative, but it also becomes a part, or an element, of the "plot."[213]

While Genette and Abbott's narratology of the epistolary form primarily takes its departure from fictitious works, Forselius argues that it is "obvious that also authentic letters have this creative dimension of the action."[214] In the analysis of the letters written by the Swedish courtesan and spy, Julie Björckegren (d. 1800), to the major general Carl Sparre (d. 1791), Forselius further writers that "[t]he letter-texts and their truth-value ought to be understood as something that impacted or created her life and experiences, rather than a "reflecting" [or "mirroring"] quality,"[215] although, as emphasized by Forselius,[216] this view does not entail a total disregard for the letters' material and social referents. However, I acknowledge that letter writing necessarily involves a particular choice of

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[211] See works such as Genette (1980), Abbott (1984), and Forselius (2003).

[212] Refer to Genette (1980: 217), Abbott (1984: 28), and Forselius (2003: 51).

[213] See Genette (1980: 217). Compare this with the Russian formalist's opposition between *fabula* and *syuzhet* (Eng. 'story'/'plot'). *Fabula* (story) refers to the chronological order of events (the train of events), that is, the raw material that exists for the creation of the *syuzhet* (plot). The *syuzhet* (plot) refers to the employment of narrative, that is, how the *fabula* (story) is told. The French structuralists later replaced the formalist opposition *fabula*/*syuzhet* with *récit*/*narration* (Roland Barthes) and *histoire*/*discours* (Tzveten Todorov). As with *fabula*, we may use the English term 'story' for the French term *histoire*. See Genette (1980: 14-15, footnote 2, p. 27) and Hühn et al. (2010: keyword: "narrative constitution").

[214] Forselius (2003: 51).

[215] Forselius (2003: 51).

[216] Forselius (2003: 51). Cf. Genette (1980: 217).

"telling," as well as selective and interpretative processes that can be highly subjective and decisive for *what* is being told and *how*.[217]

Genette recognizes three levels within a narrative: 1) the narrative content (the signified; the story), 2) the actual discourse or narrative text (the signifier; the narrative), and 3) the narrative action, which also includes the whole of the real or fictional situation in which the narrative action occurs (narrating).[218] While Genette, in his essay *Discours du récit* (1972), focuses on the second level (i.e. the narrative),[219] I will engage both the first and second level of what we refer to as a narrative in the analysis of the letter texts. Therefore, my understanding of narrative and narratological inquiry is that the scope of the narrative and its study are not confined to form and non-semantic questions.

Although some headings of the analysis might solely suggest formal aspects of the letter texts,[220] I do not stop at the formal level of narrative. In contrast to a purely formalist or structuralist approach, I do deal with the contents and semantics of the narrative form. This illustrates how one can study formal narrative elements in letters and, at the same time, what meaning or function can be deduced from the form. Thus, in a more overarching sense, while the analysis may demonstrate how one can study story making in the letter texts, the two main divisions of the analysis, in turn, may exemplify their literary and aesthetic nature on two different levels: the formal level and the semantic/thematic level.[221] The essentially inductive reasoning of the study that seeks to let the letter texts speak for themselves also owes something to this apparent division of the analysis, since an inductive approach, of itself, may entail disparities rather than similarities due to the absence of an antecedent template or systematic vision of the genre to follow. With this kind of reasoning, I hope to ensure a strong and sound bottom-up quality to the analysis.

Thus, similar to epistolary fiction, that is, fiction that is cast in an epistolary form (for example, the epistolary novel), the epistolarium (letter collection) or correspondence may be read as one single text that involves formations of narratives (form and content)[222] and two or more characters, and with respect to

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[217] Cf. Abbott (1984: 28) and Forselius (2003: 51).

[218] Genette (1980: 27).

[219] Via Genette (1980: 27-28).

[220] For example, "Dialogs and the Illusion of Mimesis" (§ 7.1.2) and "Poetry as Speech Representation and a Part of the Epistolary Narrative" (§ 7.1.3).

[221] That is, "Segment One: *al-Illighiyyāt* ('Writings from Illigh')" (§ 7.1) and "Segment Two: *Rasāʾil al-Shābbī*" ('al-Shābbī's Letters') (§ 7.2).

[222] See, for example, § 7.1.3 and "Stories of the Body: Illness and Physical Health" (§ 7.2.5).

whom devices of characterization and story making are evident.[223] Moreover, the published letters are purposely read, just as they have intentionally been transcribed and arranged by the editorial hand.

Besides aspects of the epistolary style, I will also give some attention to the more rhetorical aspects of style, in particular lexicon (vocabulary) and rhetorical figures, such as forms of the simile (*al-tashbīh*) and parallelism,[224] which are aspects that could further enhance the literariness of the letter texts. It should be noted that, while parallelism is able to take on more than one form or level (e.g. lexicon, morphology, syntax, and semantics), it may be described as, in essence, a rhetorical device of repetition or correspondence of language (whether antithetical or synonymous) that creates a sense of cohesion and balance in a textual or discursive arrangement.[225]

With regard to occurrences of poetry within the letter texts, the study will not deal with the question of prosody; rather, the discussion will be limited to the thematic and stylistic aspects of the poetry. However, it might be interesting to note that there seem to be a few inconsistencies in meter in some of the poetry that appears in the letters. My personal take on this issue is that such prosodic alternations may be quite common, especially in primarily prosaic texts, in which poetry may act as a literary code rather than being the main purpose of the text. In the specific case of letter writing, it may also be interpreted as a more or less spontaneous or extemporaneous way of incorporating poetry in the main text.

5.2.2 Integrating Intertextuality as a Key Concept

Within the framework of narrative and stylistic inquiry, the analysis integrates the task of identifying so-called "inter-texts" that may be understood as various creative (and thematic) recyclings and/or appropriations found in the letter texts. For this purpose, the study utilizes its text-centered approach in combination with the concept of intertextuality. Throughout the analysis, that is, when applicable and relevant, I incorporate the notion of intertextuality and the search for

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[223] See, for example, § 7.2.1, § 7.2.2, and "Masculine Performances and Self-Making" (§ 7.1.4 and § 7.2.7).

[224] There seem to be a variety of terms in Arabic that could correspond to or convey the idea of the device that we call parallelism in English, perhaps most notably, *muqābalah* (lit. 'comparison; correspondence') and *mulāʾamah* (lit. 'adequacy; harmony') (Arberry [1965: 23-24]). Cf. *muwāzanah* ('equilibrium') and *mumāthalah* ('congruence') in Meisami and Starkey (1998: keyword: "muwāzana")

[225] Sloane (2001: keyword: "parallelism") and Baldick (2015: keyword: "parallelism").

indigenous and non-indigenous inter-texts[226] on both formal and semantic levels of the letter texts.[227]

By first placing the letter texts at the center of the analysis, one may begin to test how the letters relate to other texts and literary and discursive conventions both within and outside the Arabic literary tradition, both generically and thematically. As Julie Sanders has already said: "Any exploration of intertextuality, and its specific manifestation in the forms of adaptation and appropriation, is inevitably interested in how art creates art, or how literature is made by literature."[228] I recognize that such relationships between texts may be established through different devices and textual components like allusions, adaptations, and appropriations and may take place on more than one level within the texts. My understanding and use of intertextuality are therefore not limited to thematics or form/genre, but rather, again, encompass a wider range of aspects of the letter texts.[229] For example, I recognize that a relationship of intertextuality can also be established on stylistic grounds, which includes lexicon (vocabulary) and rhetorical figures, such as the simile and parallelism.

Thus, intertextuality is adopted as a conceptual tool that informs, in principal, the whole of the analysis by acknowledging that "literary texts are built from systems, codes and traditions established by previous works of literature […]," as well as "systems, codes and traditions from companion art forms."[230] In these ways, one may test how the study's hypothesis of the letters' aesthetic autonomy and expression of some kind of literary genius can be supported. After all, intertextuality may show us "how art creates art" and "how literature is made by literature."[231] It should also be noted that, in this context, the term appropriation is understood as a kind of literary intervention through which the writers more or less

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[226] Here, non-indigenous inter-texts are broadly understood as those conventions, genres, and works that originate or reside outside of the Arabic and/or Islamic literary and/or discursive contexts.

[227] See, for example, §7.1.1, § 7.2.1, and "Censure of Time and Life: Outlooks and Modality" (§ 7.2.4).

[228] Sanders (2006: 1).

[229] Here, I draw on Genette's alternative notion of transtextuality that "sets the text in relationship, whether obvious or concealed, with other texts," covering all aspects of the text. See Genette (1992: 83-84). However, I will not use Genette's technical categories of transtextuality in an explicit and systematical way; rather, I use the term intertextuality in that inclusive sense without the use of additional technical categories to classify different aspects and levels of intertextuality.

[230] Sanders (2006: 3).

[231] Sanders (2006: 1).

modify literary or artistic elements (including discourses) or reuse them for new purposes or within new literary contexts.[232]

5.3 A Note on Homosociality and Masculinities

In the analysis, the working definition of the term 'homosocial' is a purely descriptive one. The term 'homosocial,' or 'homosociality,' is used to describe non-sexual or non-romantic same-sex relationships between men.[233] The critical theorist usage of the term, in which homosociality is used as an analytical tool to describe an environment where women are excluded, and/or a context of male bonding that is accompanied by homophobic sentiments, is not intended by my descriptive usage of the term. Nevertheless, the social preference for people of the same sex that this term also connotes is not left unnoticed, which, in extension, alters the gender composition of socializing contexts, such as fraternities and other social circles.[234] For, as Nils Hammarén and Thomas Johansson write on the topic of theorizing homosociality, I recognize that:

> [i]n the literature, this concept [i.e. homosociality] is mainly used as a tool to understand and dissect male friendships and men's collective attempts to uphold and maintain power and hegemony […] The overall picture from the research, however, promotes the notion that homosociality clearly is a part and extension of hegemony, thus serving to always reconstruct and safeguard male interests and power.[235]

However, as Hammarén and Johansson also clearly note, which is of particular interest for the current working definition of the term 'homosociality,' which seeks to be ambient enough to encompass a plurality of masculinities and male bondings:

> There is a clear and growing body of literature that brings forward more nuanced images of masculinity, thus stretching and extending the concept of homosociality to investigate possible reconstructions of hegemonic masculinity (e.g., Anderson, 2008, 2009).[236]

In line with such research, I would argue not only for the importance of broadening the concept of homosociality, but also for incorporating a pluralistic perspective

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[232] *OED Online* (keyword: "appropriation, n.")
[233] Stevenson and Lindberg (2010: keyword: "homosocial").
[234] Griffin (2017: keyword: "homosociality").
[235] Hammarén and Johansson (2011: 5).
[236] Hammarén and Johansson (2011: 7). For the references mentioned in the quote, see Anderson (2008; 2009).

when investigating male emotionality and expressivity within literary contexts. The current study hopes to be a part of the growing literature that, while acknowledging hegemonic masculinities, also brings forth nuanced and divergent images of masculinity and homosociality as they appear in literature, not least in relation to the cultural and racialized categories that the Arabic literary tradition may connote (e.g. "Muslim" or "Arab").

Due to the very sparse research done on literary models of masculinity in Arabic literature,[237] I believe that there is a pressing need for incorporating this kind of explorative examination of masculine performances and self-making in literary studies on male authorships in Arabic, which is why I have chosen to do so in the current study. Thus, I am seeking to investigate the discursive construction and entertainment of male subjects and the relationships between these male subjects in the sampled epistolary material.[238] A text-centered literary study of these constructions of masculinities and homosociality safeguards the bottom-up quality of the analysis that I seek to uphold, including in relation to this topic. Again, this kind of inductive approach to literary models of masculinity and homosociality ensures that any final analysis or interpretation is subordinated to the actual text.

Thus, I would argue that the strengths of a literary analytical approach to the subject of masculinity and homosociality are that we are moving from the Arabic text outwards, ensuring that the interpretative and contextual aspects of our reading are always tested against the embedded qualities and features of the actual Arabic text. The literary analytical approach also highlights the use and function of literary devices and features in the construction of male subjects and their relationship with their male correspondents,[239] which would both add to the literariness of the letter texts and inform it at the same time. While not producing generalizable results, nor aiming to do so, a study of masculinity and homosociality of this kind lends itself to further inspiration and comparison with respect to future research in this nascent field.

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[237] A small body of previous literature has been found, most notably Birairi (1999), Elsadda (2007; 2012), Agachy (2009), Richardson (2012), Wen-Chin (2017), Columbu (2020), and an unpublished Master's thesis by Viteri Márquez (2020). Other studies on the construction of masculinities in the Arab and Muslim world takes place outside of the literary field (e.g. Ghoussoub and Sinclair-Webb [2009]).

[238] See in particular § 7.1.4, § 7.2.7, § 7.2.1, and § 7.2.2.

[239] See, for example, "Personal Mental Health and the Romantic Side of Pain and Suffering" (§ 7.2.3).

5.4 Working Questions

It is against the background of these essential conceptualizations of and approaches to the letter as a creative and literary form and the "artificiality" of published letters that the present study will engage the primary material by posing a set of working questions (see below). Furthermore, it is important to note that the theory and its components discussed above will only be applied and discussed in the analysis to the extent to which they are found to be relevant to and present in the letter texts. However, this disclaimer does not take away from the importance of the theory being outlined and discussed to the extent above, since it constitutes the paradigm within which this study operates; a paradigm that is largely novel in relation to research on Arabic literature and epistolography.

Working Questions
- How do the letters produce stories?;
- How does narrative organization, style, and vocabulary affect story making?
- What kinds of story worlds and characters do the letters construct?
- How are events and subjective sentiments reproduced and transformed in the epistolary written text?
- How do such properties inform the discursive images of masculinity and homosociality?

The questions are intentionally left somewhat open or broad to give room for the potential variety of literary properties and themes that may be induced through a text-centered approach to the letter texts. Moreover, I motive this choice and reasoning by reminding the reader that this kind of literary study of Arabic letters – from this time-period or another – is untypical. Thus, I would argue that, given the current state of the art within this research area, it is important to allow the texts, within some theoretical and methodological parameters (as outlined in this chapter), to unfold and generate analytical material as freely as possible, particularly in anticipation that this approach will aid the formulation of questions and focuses for future research within the area of Arabic letters, letter collections, and epistolography. In practical terms, I have generated the focuses and themes of the analysis[240] through a close reading that, with the aid of my working questions, enabled me to gather significant and/or prominent features, themes, and patterns.

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[240] As outlined in § 7.1 and § 7.2.

During this initial analytical stage of the study, I documented my findings according to thematic divisions (e.g. characters' dynamics, illness and health, and *dhamm al-dahr* [censure of time/fate]), which were then assembled together and organized accordingly in the analysis.

PART III: ANALYSIS

6. Introduction

This introductory chapter to the analysis presents brief biographies of the seven letter writers in order to introduce the reader to the historical figures behind the sampled letters and their specific historical contexts. The reader is first introduced to the three letter writers of *Rasāʾil al-Shābbī* (§ 6.1.1) and then to the four letter writers of *al-Illighiyyāt* (§ 6.1.2).

It should be noted that the study's advocating of a text-centered approach to the sampled letter texts should not be mistaken for a total disregard for or rejection of history and historicity. In line with other literary scholars that have argued for a text-centered method,[241] I agree that literary analysis and interpretation need the aid of history, because how would we otherwise understand, for example, textual referents and the specific usage of words? Moreover, as pointed out above (§ 5.1), referentiality is also a core aspect of the epistolary pact. However, we must maintain that historical-biographical inquiries and explanations are not the sole nor the main road into the text.

6.1 The Letter Writers or *Dramatis Personae*

What follows are brief biographies of the writers of the letters that were sampled for the analysis below. The reader will undoubtedly notice that the amount of information and the details provided varies from letter writer to letter writer. This is due to the differing availability of and accessibility to biographical information about the historical persons of concern. Inevitably, when writing biographies of personalities, such as Abū al-Qāsim al-Shābbī, Muḥammad al-Mukhtār al-Sūsī, and Muḥammad al-Ḥulaywī, one will have more sources to readily consult than, say, when writing those of Ibrāhīm ibn Aḥmad, the cousin of al-Sūsī, and Shaykh al-Ṭāhir ibn Muḥammad al-Īfrānī.

Moreover, for a better understanding of the letter writers and the broader social contexts in which they wrote, I have deemed it necessary and useful to first include a segment that briefly describes the socio-political situation in Tunisia and Morocco at the time. The backdrop will focus on a few key events that took place

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[241] As argued and discussed in the article by Wellek (1978: 615).

in the two countries in relation to two important societal groups, namely, political and religious figures and social agents, and the colonial presence in the two countries. In the case of Morocco, the section will concentrate on the French colonial power and its regime, rather than on the Spanish colony in the northern and southern parts of the country.[242] Not only did French Morocco have a larger territory, it also covered the areas that are relevant to our Moroccan letter writers, in particular Marrakech, Rabat, and Fez. Moreover, limited space calls us to narrow down our focus in this regard.

6.1.1 The Three Friends in Tunisia

In *Rasāʾil al-Shābbī*, the correspondence between al-Shābbī and al-Ḥulaywī opens in the middle of summer, with a letter from al-Shābbī dated "29 *muḥarram* 1348" (7 July 1929), and ends with a letter from al-Ḥulaywī dated 19 August 1934 (8 Jumādá al-Awwal 1353). The first letter from al-Bashrūsh to al-Ḥulaywī was written in February 1933, with no date specified, and ends with an undated letter in connection to the death of their mutual friend al-Shābbī in October 1934. Thus, the epistolarium comprises letters that were written and exchanged during a period of roughly five years.

Needless to say, many critical events took place both inside and outside of Tunisia, during the first half of the 20th century. In the West, we had the dire stock market crash of Wall Street in 1929, initiating the Great Depression that would hang over the Western world for most of the coming decade. In 1933, the NSDAP ascended to power and Adolf Hitler was appointed as Reich Chancellor of Germany. In East Asia, the fatal Chinese Civil War, in which the Chinese Communist Party would eventually emerge as victorious, was as yet ongoing.

Inside Tunisia, which still had at least two decades to go until its independence from the French colonial rule, we find the emergence of two key political movements: the Destour Party (*al-Ḥizb al-ḥurr al-dustūrī*, 'The Constitutional Liberal Party') (est. 4 June 1920) and its progeny, the Neo-Destour Party (*al-Ḥizb al-ḥurr al-dustūrī al-jadīd*, 'The New Constitutional Liberal Party') (est. 1 March 1934). After the First World War, the earlier nationalist party, Young Tunisians (*Jeunes Tunisiens*) (est. 7 February 1907), branched out to form the Destour

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[242] The northern zone of the Spanish colonial territory covered the area of the Mediterranean coastline and the Strait of Gibraltar, encompassing cities such as Ceuta, Larache (al-ʿArāʾish), Tetuán (Taṭwān), and Melilla (Am. Tamlilt), while the southern zone covered Cape Juby and the borders to Western (then Spanish) Sahara, which encompassed cities like Tarfaya (Ṭarfāyah), then called Villa Bens, and Ifni (Ifnī). See Díaz-Andreu (2015: 50-52).

Party.[243] The leader of the new movement was the nationalist and reformist ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz al-Thaʿālibī (d. 1944), who was also the editor of one of the first Arabic nationalistic journals, *Sabīl al-rashād* ('The Way of Integrity') (est. 1896).[244]

During a journey in Egypt, al-Thaʿālibī met with prominent figures from the Egyptian Arab nationalist and reformist movement, such as Muḥammad ʿAbduh (d. 1323/1905), Muḥammad Rashīd Riḍā (d. 1354/1935), and the political journalist and editor-in-chief of the pan-Islamic and anti-colonialist newspaper *al-Muʾayyid* ('The Supporter'), ʿAlī Yūsuf (d. 1331/1913), who all contributed to the nationalist thought of the Destour Party's leader.[245] Its progeny, the Neo-Destour Party, which was founded about fourteen years later, was chiefly lead by the authoritarian reformer and, at a later stage, by the first president of the Republic of Tunisia, Ḥabīb Būʹrgībah (al-Ḥabīb Bū Raqībah) (1321-1421/1903-2000).

Būʹrgībah was, in fact, skeptical of the Arab nationalism and pan-Arab politics that the preceding Destour Party had indulged. Instead, rather than Arab, Būʹrgībah specifically advocated for a Tunisian nationalism and was in favor of French-Arabic bilingualism, while also affirming the Arab character of the country.[246] In the language politics of Būʹrgībah and his supporters, Arabization did not entail an entire transformation of the Tunisian society to a standard variant of the Arabic language; rather, its purpose was to introduce bilingualism and, according to some proponents (including Būʹrgībah), bring more attention to the Tunisian vernacular language.[247] Thus, here, it may be more correct to speak of "Tunisification" rather than Arabization, the former concept often being more tolerant of a bilingual system.[248] On that note, interestingly enough, it was only a small group of the Tunisian population who were able to attain actual proficiency in French, most probably those who had had the social and economic privilege of receiving education within a pure French school system.[249]

In connection with the nationalist reformists and their social cause, one must also remember the great status that the Tunisian *ʿulamāʾ*,[250] the religious scholars,

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[243] Refer to Bearman et al. (2012: keyword: "dustūr").
[244] Bearman et al. (2012: keywords: "al-Thaʿālibī").
[245] See Bearman et al. (2012: keyword: "al-Thaʿālibī").
[246] Fleet et al. (2014: keyword: "Bourguiba").
[247] Refer to Green (1978: 199).
[248] See Micaud (1978: 93-94).
[249] See Versteegh (2014: 259-262, 266-267). Cf. Micaud (1978: 93-94, 100).
[250] *ʿUlamāʾ* pl. of *ʿālim*, "[...] learned , erudite; scholar, savant, scientist; (in Islam) theologian and expert in canonical law." Refer to Wehr (1979: keyword: "ʿalima"). In the specific Tunisian context dealt with in the segment, Arnold Green presents a much-needed

enjoyed as elites within the Tunisian societal order and contemplate the social manifestations of their status. The appearances of the Tunisian *ʿulamāʾ* were many and diverse, and we will not be able to go through them all here, but some of particular interest are their enjoyment of privileges that were very similar to those of some high administrative officials, such as the frequent receiving of royal gifts in the form of residences and estates, and the benefit of residing close to influential and wealthy statesmen in places like Sidi Bou Saïd (Sīdī Bū Saʿīd), Carthage (Qarṭāj), La Marsa (al-Marsá), and Hammam-Lif (Ḥammām al-Anf). In addition to the above material privileges, the religious scholars were also reserved certain epithets and titles of honor, by which they were addressed.[251]

Thus, as a body, the religious figures had a strong sense of corporate identity. In a sense, they were a "literati" that specialized in the task of conserving societal values through the interpretation of sacred texts.[252] The Mufti and Imam of Turkish origin, Aḥmad ibn Muḥammad Bayram (d. 1353/1935), who earned the honorific "*shaykh al-islām*" ('Shaykh of Islam'),[253] declared that the role of the *ʿulamāʾ* in Tunisia was to personify Islam in Tunisia,[254] hence why the whole value system of the religious scholars and their public appearance was highly identified with the religion. Moreover, this air of traditionalism – or neo-traditionalism – also manifested itself through language, through the use of a refined Arabic that was closer to Classical Arabic than the vernacular, in both official and unofficial situations.[255]

During the years under the French colonialism, an almost exclusively French administration was established, along with a number of French schools, which promoted the French language both as the object of study and as the means of instruction. Classical Arabic was therefore confined to the traditional theological institute, al-Zaytūnah, as well as to Ṣādiqiyyah College (al-Madrasah

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delimitation of the usage of the term *ʿulamāʾ*. Here, the term denotes "a sort of academic fraternity which had entrance requirements based on religious as well as on scholarly considerations. [...] Since no one was employed as an alim [sic] or granted a degree as one, the title was honorific or ascribed rather than technical" (Green [1978: 25-26]).

[251] Green (1978: 50).

[252] Cf. Green 1978 (51).

[253] Refer to Green (1978: 243). For more on the honorific "*shaykh al-islām*" and its history, see Bearman et al. (2012: keyword: "Shaykh al-Islām").

[254] Via Green 1978 (51).

[255] Green (1978: 50).

al-Ṣādiqiyyah, est. 1875), founded by the reformer Khayr al-Dīn Pāshā al-Tūnisī (d. 1307/1890).[256]

The "Arabists," as Mohamed Daoud refers to them, includes all advocates of the Arabic language, including Arabic linguists, Arab nationalists, teachers, and Muslim activists. What they all have in common is that they perceived both Tunisian Arabic and French as threats to the purity of Classical Arabic, which in turn gave rise to a resistance to the concurrent advocacies for a holistic modernization or standardization of the Arabic language.[257] In addition to that, many of these Arabists were also active in Arabization agencies that particularly concerned themselves with getting through a language policy that would serve their social and ideological cause.[258]

Thus, in short, the religious figures and social agents adopted a more or less mono-cultural and traditionalist, or purist, stance in questions concerning the national identity of Tunisian society, which, as has been shown, was closely linked to language and its cultural conceptualizations. After all, "Arabization" – in its sociolinguistic and cultural sense – almost invariably constituted a major component in the struggle for independence throughout the colonized Arab world. The language was seen as a part of the Muslim identity of the country, as well as of religious orthodoxy. Because of the ʿulamāʾ's high position within the Tunisian societal order, their traditional value system and its various manifestations, Classical Arabic being one of them, and their societal as well as political function, must presumably have exceeded that of a mere symbolic value of a venerated past.

The impact of the colonial presence and language politics on pre-independence Tunisian society and its intellectual and cultural life cannot be overestimated. In pre-independence Tunisia, French became an official part of the public space (e.g. bilingual currency [the franc], street names, and building signs), while Arabic, regardless of its variety, was limited to religion and the privacy of one's home.[259] This was because of the stern language policies that the French colonial power (1881-1956) implemented.

The harsh language policies of the colonial power prior to the 1910s may be illustrated by the introduction of a press law that would only tolerate newspapers in French, consequently inhibiting the printing of domestic newspapers in Arabic

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[256] See Micaud (1974: 93-94) and Daoud (1991: 9). For more on Ṣādiqiyyah College, see Bearman et al. (2012: keyword: "al-Ṣādiḳiyya").

[257] See Newman (2013) and Versteegh (2014: 259-262, 266-267).

[258] Daoud (1991: 12).

[259] See Dobie (2003) and Versteegh (2014: 259-262, 266-267).

and the importing of Arabic newspapers from outside of the country.[260] In order to establish a newspaper one was required to obtain special rights and, as an Arab, submit oneself to French conditions, such as adopting the French language or seeking French citizenship.[261] From the 1910s onwards, however, the severity of these language policies was somewhat lessened and it became possible to publish Arabic newspapers on a domestic level, albeit under strict control.[262]

One may say that French was – and to a great degree continued to be post-independence – not only the language that dominated the public space, but also the one language that guaranteed social and economic mobility.[263] However, as modern Tunisian history has shown, with its disparate political and cultural voices emanating from nationalists, conservatives, and reformists alike, sometimes one has to know the rules well in order to break them effectively.

Muḥammad al-Ḥulaywī

One may think that, granted the almost legendary status of Abū al-Qāsim al-Shābbī and the apparent leading role he has been given in the epistolarium *Rasāʾil al-Shābbī*, as hinted in both its title and introduction, he should be dealt with first in this company of three friends. Insomuch as this may be true, al-Ḥulaywī is still the compiler and editor of the book, and for that reason, he will appear first.

His full name is Muḥammad ibn ʿAbd al-Salām ibn Aḥmad ibn ʿAlī al-Ḥulaywī al-Qayrawānī and he is perhaps most remembered as a writer, poet, and literary critic; he was also an elementary school teacher and, at a later point, a professor in a secondary school.[264] al-Ḥulaywī was born on 3 August 1907 (12 Jumādá al-Thānī, 1324AH) in the old and well-known city of Kairouan (al-Qayrawān), situated about 184 kilometers from the capital Tunis. He got his primary education at a Franco-Arabic school in Kairouan. After graduating, he pursued further education at the teacher training college in Tunis (Madrasat Tarshīḥ al-Muʿallimīn, today: Dār al-Muʿallimīn al-ʿUlyá at Tunis University), until he graduated in 1927 at the age of 20 or 21.[265]

It was during his time as a student at the teacher training college that al-Ḥulaywī met al-Shābbī. Their first meeting took place during one of al-Ḥulaywī's visits to his cousin and childhood friend Shaykh Maḥmūd al-Bājī (d. 1407/1987), who, like

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[260] See Dajani (2011: 55-57).
[261] Dajani (2011: 55-57).
[262] Dajani (2011: 55-57).
[263] Chaldeos (2016: 383-384) and Horne (2017: 118).
[264] Maḥfūẓ (1994: keyword: "al-Ḥulaywī") and Fontaine (1999: 205-206).
[265] Maḥfūẓ (1994: keyword: "al-Ḥulaywī"); al-Jazzār and al-Qāsmī (2012:13).

al-Shābbī, was a student at the Zaytūnah Institute (al-Zaytūnah) in Tunis.[266] After graduating from the teacher training college in Tunis, al-Ḥulaywī also received diplomas in translation studies (1930) and Arabic literature (1940), and in 1960 was appointed as Assistant Professor at the Secondary School of Kairouan (Maʿhad al-Qayrawān al-Thānawī), where he worked until retiring ten years later.[267]

al-Ḥulaywī in company (n.d.).[268] From right to left: Dr. Ibrāhīm Shubbūḥ, French orientalist Régis Blachére, al-Ḥulaywī, and poet and professor Jaʿfar Mājid

In *Tarājim al-muʾallifīn al-tūnisiyyīn* ('The Biographies of Tunisian Writers'), Muḥammad Maḥfūẓ writes that, already at an early stage in his youth, probably in his early or mid-teens, al-Ḥulaywī came into contact with some of the litterateurs and writers of Kairouan. This group of writers consisted of personalities such as the journalist and founder of the cultured paper *al-Qayrawān* ('The Kairouan Gazette'), al-Shaykh ʿUmar al-ʿUjrah, and the poets al-Shādhilī ʿAṭāʾ Allāh (d. 1412/1991), Muḥammad Būʿsharbiyyah al-Anṣārī (d. 1372/1952), and Muḥammad al-Fāʾiz (d. 1372/1953).[269]

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[266] Maḥfūẓ (1994: keyword: "al-Ḥulaywī"); al-Jazzār and al-Qāsmī (2012: 13-14).

[267] Maḥfūẓ (1994: keyword: "al-Ḥulaywī").

[268] Unless otherwise stated, all the pictures used in this section ("The Three Friends in Tunisia") can be found in *Rasāʾil al-Shābbī* (al-Ḥulaywī [1966, front matter]) and were first published in Tunisia. These pictures are now part of the public domain, given that their copyright protection has come to an end as per *Law No. 93-36 of February 24, 1994, on Literary and Artistic Property* (*Qānūn ʿadad 36 li-sanat 1994 muʾarrakh fī 24 fīfrī 1994 yataʿallaqu bi-al-milkiyyah al-adabiyyah wa-al-fanniyyah*). Image from *Wikimedia Commons* (Retrieved: 2019-06-20).

[269] Maḥfūẓ (1994: keyword: "al-Ḥulaywī").

For the task of filling its pages, al-ʿUjrah's paper, *al-Qayrawān*, was more or less left by its founder to the young, debuting writers of Kairouan, such as al-Ḥulaywī, Muḥammad al-Fāʾiz, and Būʾsharbiyyah.[270] Furthermore, at that particular time, there seems to have been a general trend among the educated youth of Kairouan to get their work published in papers and distribute them among themselves, and al-Ḥulaywī himself got some of his articles published in *al-Qayrawān* under a pseudonym when he was not more than sixteen of age.[271] The articles that the young debuting writers of Kairouan produced dealt with subjects such as issues within the educational system and the affairs of literary clubs and organizations.[272]

Young al-Ḥulaywī in year 1934

The literary thought of al-Ḥulaywī, of which criticism, according to Fontaine, was his sharpest domain and where he made the most crucial contributions,[273] had two main sources of influence, namely the literary criticism of Arab writers writing from within the Arab world and the writings of the *Mahjar* poets ('The Immigrant Poets').[274]

The literary revivalist movement was initiated by the Tunisian reformer and journalist Zīn al-ʿĀbidīn al-Sanūssī (1901-1965) from Sidi Bou Saïd, primarily through his literary journal *al-ʿĀlam al-adabī* ('The Literary World') (est. March 1930). Fontaine writes that the journal of al-Sanūssī "a eu la chance d'avoir un soutien critique dans la personne de Muhammad al-HALIWI [sic][…]"[275] While Fontaine does not elaborate on how al-Ḥulaywī's critical support manifested itself, it may be deduced that it primarily took form in his own writings within the field of literary criticism.

Although perhaps uttered out of fraternal love and admiration, al-Ḥulaywī himself seems to have been of the firm belief that the true champion of the literary revivalist or reformist movement (*ḥarakat al-tajdīd al-adabī*) in the country was none other than his friend al-Shābbī. In a personal letter sent from Béni Khalled

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270 Maḥfūẓ (1994: keyword: "al-Fāʾiz") and al-Marʿashlī (2006: 1097).
271 Maḥfūẓ (1994: keyword: "al-Ḥulaywī"; 1994d: 12-13).
272 Maḥfūẓ (1994: keyword: "al-Shābbī").
273 Fontaine (1999, vol. 2: 205). Cf. Maḥfūẓ (1994: keyword: "al-Ḥulaywī").
274 Fontaine (1999, vol. 2: 205).
275 "[it] was fortune enough to find critical support in the person of al-Ḥulaywī." Fontaine (1999, vol. 2: 205).

(Banī Khallād) in February 1933, he vouches for his friend in a hyperbolic confessional spirit:

<div dir="rtl">

وأنا الذي أول من آمن برسالتك بل وأنا الذي حييت فيك ـ منذ صدور الخيال الشعري ـ زعيما جريئا لحركة التجديد الادبي بتونس. ريثما أحي فيك الرسول الذي أدى رسالة الادب.[276]

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I am the first to believe in your message; rather, I am the one who in you – ever since the dawn of *The Poetic Imagination* [*al-Khayāl al-shiʿrī*] – have seen a brave leader for the literary reformist movement in Tunisia. Since, in you, I see the Messenger who was sent to convey the Message of Literature.

In a letter written in December of the same year,[277] al-Ḥulaywī discloses to al-Shābbī, with a similar visionary energy, the great esteem in which he holds his friend. Here, al-Ḥulaywī uses the French writers Lamartine and Sainte-Beuve and their friendship as personal tokens for their own literary cause, its struggles, and the detrimental "temptations" that might lure in the outside world, and which may divorce the artist from his call:

<div dir="rtl">

وقد وجدت في هاته المجلة نص الرسائل التي تبودلت بين «لامرتين» و «سانت بيف» الناقد الرومنتيكي الشهير من أول تعارفهما الى حين القطيعة. وفيها اعجاب «سانت بيف» «بلامرتين» اعجابا مطلقا ثم صداقته له ثم مودته الى اخوته ثم الوقت الذي انصرف فيه «لامرتين» عن الأدب الى السياسة وهنا كانت القطيعة بفصل [...] وقد أشركتك بهاته الكلمة في تلك المتعة الفكرية التي شعرت بها عند تلاوة هاته الرسائل لاني رأيت فيها صورة مطابقة لما بيننا من تبادل الوداد وتبادل الآمال في المستقبل. [...] وكأن صوتا صادرا من نفسي يقول: أنت في هاته الرسائل تشبه «سانت بيف» وصديقك يشبه «لامرتين» [...] واني لأرجو ان تظل صداقتنا الى الابد بلا قطيعة أو جفاء والسلام

من أخيك[278]

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In this journal [*majallat al-ʿĀlamīn*],[279] I found the letters that had been exchanged between Lamartine and Sainte-Beuve, the famous Romantic critic,

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276 al-Ḥulaywī (1966: 103).
277 Béni Khalled, 10 December 1933. See al-Ḥulaywī (1966: 122-124).
278 al-Ḥulaywī (1966: 124).
279 This most probably refers to the French literary newspaper *Le Globe* (1824-1832).

from the time of their acquaintance to the rupture of their relationship. In these
letters, one finds Sainte-Beuve's great admiration for Lamartine, manifestations
of his friendship with him, and his sincere love and feelings of fraternity towards
him, up until the day when Lamartine left literature for politics. This is where
they parted ways with each other. […] In that intellectual pleasure which I felt
upon reciting [ʿinda tilāwah] their letters, I associated [the words of
Sainte-Beuve] with you, because, in them, I saw a resemblance to that which we
have of mutual love [widād] and mutual exchange of hopes about the future. […]
It was as if a voice from within myself said: "In these letters, you resemble
Sainte-Beuve, and your friend, he resembles Lamartine" […] But I truly do hope
that our friendship will last forever; without any rupture or disloyalty. Peace.
From your brother.

The above excerpt from al-Ḥulaywī's letter in a way also exemplifies his take on
modern comparative literature (al-adab al-muqāran), which somewhat differed
from that of his peers and senior literary critics. al-Ḥulaywī was skeptical of the
tendency of the field to overestimate the question of influence and often to make
hasty and, according to al-Ḥulaywī, ungrounded conclusions thereof. Instead of
resorting to the idea of taking and borrowing (al-akhdh wa-al-iqtibās), al-Ḥulaywī
adopts, in essence, an asymptotic (juxtaposing or approximating) approach, in
which something gets closer and closer to something else, but never quite reach.[280]
He himself wrote comparatively about the pre-modern poet and critic Abū ʿAlī
al-Ḥasan al-Qayrawānī (d. 456/1063-4 or 463/1071), commonly known as Ibn
Rashīq, the French poet and literary critic Nicolas Boileau-Despréaux (d. 1711),
the Arab prose writer al-Jāḥiẓ (d. 255/868 or 869), and Voltaire (d. 1778).[281]

It is clear that, for al-Ḥulaywī, authors from either completely different epochs,
or simply from different generations, can arrive at the same or similar results or
deliver a corresponding set of ideas without them necessarily having come into
contact with the works of their foregoers.[282] Thus, similitude does not necessarily
entail or ought to be thought of as a giving-and-receiving, or influencer-and-
influenced, type of relationship between two literary works. Just as critics found
that Boileau expressed ideas and opinions similar to those found in al-ʿUmdah

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[280] Cf. al-Jazzār and al-Qāsimī (2012: 26-27).

[281] See al-Ḥulaywī's two articles: "Ṣināʿat al-shiʿr bayna Ibn Rashīq wa-Bwālū" ('The Craft of
Poetry According to Ibn Rashīq and Boileau') and "Muqāranah bayna al-Jāḥiẓ wa-Fūltīr"
('A Comparison between al-Jāḥiẓ and Voltaire'), in al-Jazzār and al-Qāsimī (2012: 181-187;
188-194).

[282] Refer to al-Ḥulaywī's article "Ṣināʿat al-shiʿr bayna Ibn Rashīq wa-Bwālū" via al-Jazzār
and al-Qāsimī (2012: 181-187).

('The Mainstay') by his North African predecessor Ibn Rashīq,[283] al-Ḥulaywī was taken aback by the incidental similarities between his and al-Shābbī's exchanged letters and those of Sainte-Beuve and Lamartine.

Kairouan 1904, a view from one of the minarets showing the city wall[284]

In the social aspects of life, al-Ḥulaywī was also a defender of the nationalist and reformist al-Ṭāḥir al-Ḥaddād (d. 1353/1935) when his book *Imraʾatunā fī al-sharīʿah wa-al-mujtamaʿ* ('Our Woman in Islamic Law and Society') caused a great stir in the cultural and intellectual spheres of the country, including the Tunisian press.[285] al-Ḥaddād is generally recognized as having pioneered the Tunisian movement for feminine liberation, and through his book *Imraʾatunā fī al-sharīʿah*, he took on the task of proving that his seemingly liberal ideas and call for increasing the rights of women were not antithetical to Islamic teachings.[286]

In one of his letters, sent to al-Shābbī from Béni Khalled,[287] dated 5 November 1930, al-Ḥulaywī tells his friend about an earlier visit to the capital and antagonistically expresses his disappointment in the reception of al-Ḥaddād's

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[283] Ibn Rashīq was originally from present-day Algeria. His work, *al-ʿUmdah* ('The Mainstay'), is a well-known encyclopedic work on poetry. For more on Ibn Rashīq, see van Fleet et al. (2014: keyword: "Ibn Rashīq").

[284] Source: Library of Congress, via *PICRYL* (Retrieved: 2019-02-14). Public Domain Images.

[285] See al-Ḥulaywī (1966: 55).

[286] See Bearman et al. (2012: keyword: "al-Ḥaddād, al-Ṭāhir").

[287] al-Ḥulaywī (1966: 54-56).

work, as well as an aversion to the coercive conservative forces that want to silence it:

ذهبت الى الحاضرة في أول هذا الشهر وتمكنت من رؤية «تونس النوادي» أثر تلك الصاعقة

الساحقة التي نزلت على رؤوس أحلاس الجمود وانضاء اللحود فتركتهم كالمجانين لا يلوون

على شيء ولا يفقهون ما يقولون وأحسب أنك اطلعت على ما قالت الصحف التونسية في

تلك المسألة وما سودته أغلب الجرائد الرجعية. وقد سكت عن كتاب الحداد كل من كان يرجى

منه أن يدافع ويقارع وحسبك أن «الصواب» لم يكتب كلمة ولم أر من انتصر للمؤلف الا

جريدة «الهلال» ومجلة العالم الادبي، ولكن باسلوب فاتر وعبارات متكلفة.²⁸⁸

> I paid a visit to the capital at the beginning of this month. From the "Tunisia of the social circles and associations," I managed to observe the impact of that lightning bolt [i.e. the book of al-Ḥaddād] which struck down on the heads of the addicts of rigidity [aḥlās al-jumūd] and the tattered garments of the tombs [anḍāʾ al-luḥūd]. Thus, I left them, like buffoons who do not care about anything nor understand what they themselves are saying. I assume that you have already read what the Tunisian press have said in the matter and how the majority of the reactionary newspapers discredit it [the book]. Likewise, all those from whom one had expected defense and support remained silent about al-Ḥaddād's book. You know enough when you hear that al-Ṣawāb ['Reason'] did not write a single word about it. I did not see anyone standing up for the author except for the paper al-Hilāl ['The Crescent'] and the journal al-ʿĀlam al-adabī. Even they did so in a languid and artificial manner.

al-Ḥulaywī concludes his point of view by informing al-Shābbī that Tunisia is currently tantamount to two fighting parties: one party consisting of the forces of a highhanded tyrant (ḥizb quwá ʿāt jabbār muhājim), who are the radical reactionaries (al-rajʿiyyīn al-mutaṭarrifīn), and another one consisting of the reformist thinkers (al-mufakkirīn al-mujaddidīn). While himself being a sympathizer and supporter of the reformist cause, the silence with which the majority of its followers responded to the controversy of al-Ḥaddād's book is, for al-Ḥulaywī, a great defeat and setback: "[…] [C]owardice and weakness has overcome its members; they are not ready to make any sacrifice for the cause of principles in the way in which al-Ḥaddād has done."²⁸⁹

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²⁸⁸ al-Ḥulaywī (1966: 55).
²⁸⁹ al-Ḥulaywī (1966: 55).

Other than *Rasāʾil al-Shābbī*,[290] a few examples from al-Ḥulaywī's bibliography are:[291]

- *Fī al-adab al-tūnisī* ('About Tunisian Literature')[292]
- *al-Taʾammulāt* ('Reflections') (*dīwān*/poetry)[293]
- *Maʿa al-Shābbī* ('Conversations with al-Shābbī')[294]
- *Rasāʾil* ('Letters')[295]
- *Mabāḥith wa-dirāsāt adabiyyah* ('Literary Studies')[296]
- *Fī al-tarbiyah wa-al-taʿlīm* ('On Teaching and Education')[297]
- *Yawmiyyāt Muḥammad al-Ḥulaywī* ('The Diary of Muḥammad al-Ḥulaywī')[298]
- Numerous creative, journalistic, and academic contributions to contemporaneous literary journals and papers, such as:
  - *Abūllū* ('Apollo') (Egypt, 1932-1934);[299]
    "Shakwá wa-alam" ('Complaint and Pain') (poetry)[300]
    "al-Rūmāntīsm fī al-adab al-faransī" ('Romanticism in French Literature') (literary criticism)[301]
    "Ibn Rashīq: raʾyuhu fī al-shiʿr wa-al-shāʿir" ('Ibn Rashīq and his View on Poetry and the Poet') (literary criticism)[302]

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[290] Published by Dār al-Maghrib al-ʿArabī (Tunis, 1966).

[291] For a comprehensive bibliography, see the Complete Works project, *al-Aʿmāl al-kāmilah li-Muḥammad al-Ḥulaywī* ('The Complete Works of Muḥammad al-Ḥulaywī'), edited by Munṣif al-Jazzār and Fatḥī al-Qāsimī (2012). See also Maḥfūẓ (1994: keyword: "al-Ḥulaywī").

[292] The book was published in 1969 by al-Dār al-Tūnisiyyah lil-Nashr (Tunis).

[293] Published in 1987 by al-Muʾassasah al-Waṭaniyyah lil-Tarjamah wa-al-Taḥqīq wa-al-Dirāsāt (Bayt al-Ḥikmah) (Tunis). This is a collection (*dīwān*) of original poetry by the author himself, a large amount of which had previously been published in literary journals.

[294] Published in 1955 by Silsilat Kitāb al-Baʿth (Tunis). This book is especially dedicated to the literary work of al-Shābbī.

[295] Unpublished. See Maḥfūẓ (1994: keyword: "al-Ḥulaywī"). Maḥfūẓ only lists the titles of al-Ḥulaywī's bibliography without specifying their content; however, what is apparent from the title of this work is that it is another epistolarium besides *Rasāʾil al-Shābbī*.

[296] Published in 1977 by al-Sharikah al-Tūnisiyyah lil-Tawzīʿ in Tunis.

[297] Unpublished (Maḥfūẓ, 1994a: 70).

[298] Manuscript. Published for the first time in al-Jazzār and al-Qāsmī (2012: 1312-1352).

[299] Founded by the Egyptian writer and physician Aḥmad Zakī Abū Shādī (1374/1955). For more on Abū Shādī, see Bearman et al. (2012: keyword: "Abū Shādī").

[300] *Abūllū*, No. 10 (June 1933[a]): 1136-1138.

[301] *Abūllū*, No. 2 (October 1933[c]): 136-142.

[302] *Abūllū*, No. 10 (June 1933[b]): 1161-1167.

- *al-Risālah* ('The Message') (Egypt, 1933-1953);[303]
  "Yuʿjibunī…" ('I Like…') (poetry)[304]
  "Ilá al-Maʿarrī" ('To al-Maʿarrī') (poetry)[305]

- *al-Fikr* ('Thought') (Tunisia, 1955-1986);[306]
  "Min udabāʾinā al-rāḥilīn: al-Bashrūsh" ('From our Late Authors: al-Bashrūsh') (literary criticism)[307]

  "Ṣuwar gharībah lil-Shābbī" ('Peculiar Images of al-Shābbī') (literary criticism)[308]

  "al-Shiʿr al-siyāsī fī al-adab al-tūnisī al-muʿāṣir" ('Political Poetry in Contemporary Tunisian Literature') (literary criticism)[309]

  "Dhikrá laylah bi-ḥadāʾiq al-Qaṣar bi-Qurṭubah" ('A Remembrance of a Night in the Gardens of Alcázar of Córdoba') (poetry)[310]

Abū al-Qāsim al-Shābbī

Abū al-Qāsim al-Shābbī ibn al-Shaykh Muḥammad ibn Abī al-Qāsim Ibrāhīm al-Shābbī was, according to the information published about him during his lifetime and posthumously, born on 24 February 1909 (3 Ṣafar, 1327AH) in a village called al-Shābbiyyah located in southern Tunisia, close to the city of Tozeur (Tūzir).[311]

al-Shābbī's father, Shaykh Muḥammad ibn Abī al-Qāsim al-Shābbī, had studied at the institutes of both al-Azhar in Cairo, where he was a prominent student of the modernist reformist Muḥammad ʿAbduh, and al-Zaytūnah in Tunis.[312] In the year 1910, his father obtained the position of an Islamic judge (qāḍin), in Siliana (Silyānah) in northern Tunisia, around 130 kilometers from the

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[303] Founded by the Egyptian intellectual and political writer Aḥmad Ḥasan al-Zayyāt (d. 1388/1968).

[304] *al-Risālah*, No. 97 (May 1935): 787-788.

[305] *al-Risālah*, No. 62 (September 1934): 1503. A poem dedicated to the notorious pre-modern poet, philosopher, and writer (of prose and poetry), Abū al-ʿAlāʾ Aḥmad ibn ʿAbd Allāh al-Maʿarrī (d. 449/1058). For more on al-Maʿarrī, see Bearman et al. (2012: keyword: "al-Maʿarrī").

[306] Founded by the Tunisian politician and former Prime Minister (1980-1986) Muḥammad Mzālī (d. 1410/2010).

[307] *al-Fikr*, No. 7 (April 1960[a]): 615-619.

[308] *al-Fikr*, No. 8 (May 1960[b]): 718-721.

[309] *al-Fikr*, No. 1 (October 1965): 85-90.

[310] *al-Fikr*, No. 1 (October 1969[b]): 32-33.

[311] For the absence of any legal registration of al-Shābbī's birth, refer to Ghédira (1959) and Bearman et al. (2012: keyword: "al-Shābbī").

[312] Meisami and Starkey (1998: keyword: "Abū 'l-Qāsim al-Shābbī"), Ghédira (1959: 268), and Bearman et al. (2012: keyword: "al-Shā"bī").

capital. The profession of the father naturally led him to move around the country with his family, and thus his eldest child, Abū al-Qāsim al-Shābbī, spent his early childhood moving to places such as Thala (Tālah) in the Kasserine Governate (Tun. Ar. Wilāyat al-Gaṣrīn), the coast city Gabès (Tun. Ar. Gābis), Gafsa in southwestern Tunisia, and Zaghouan (Zaghwān) in the north.[313] Thus, it was only during the last half decade of his life in cardiac illness that al-Shābbī would live in his hometown al-Shābbiyyah.

In the family history of al-Shābbī, during the time of the Ḥafṣid dynasty (r. 1228-1574), one also finds the recognized religious scholar (faqīh) and Sufi Shaykh, Aḥmad ibn Makhlūf al-Shābbī (d. ca. 887/1482), who founded the Shābbiyyah Sufi order (ṭarīqah, lit. 'path') in present-day Tunisia.[314] As we shall see below, the Sufi heritage of the family may have influenced the literary taste and readings of the young al-Shābbī.

In contrast to his close friend al-Ḥulaywī and his three younger brothers, who were to grow up to be bilingual, al-Shābbī remained more or less monolingual all his life. The fact that he received his early education entirely in Arabic, with the exception of an entry into the Franco-Arabic school in Gabès, may have been a decisive factor in his linguistic limitations.[315] Moreover, after primary school, he moved to Tunis to study at al-Zaytūnah, which he officially entered on 11 October 1920.[316] During this period in his life, al-Shābbī studied a traditional curriculum consisting of Islamic theology and Arabic literature and language.

Not very far from al-Zaytūnah, one finds two important libraries of fairly great size, namely the library of the former students of the Franco-Arab revivalist and reformist Ṣādiqiyyah College, and the Khaldūniyyah Library, belonging to the modernist Khaldūniyyah College (al-Madrasah al-Khaldūniyyah, est. 1896), that was partly established as a reconciliatory effort between alumni of the Ṣādiqiyyah College and those of al-Zaytūnah.[317]

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[313] Maḥfūẓ (1994: keyword: "al-Shābbī"), Meisami and Starkey (1998: keyword: "Abū 'l-Qāsim al-Shābbī"), and Bearman et al. (2012: keyword: "al-Shābbī").

[314] The Shābbiyyah order spread among the peasantries in present-day Tunisia and Algeria. The order also spread and gained followers outside of Tunisia and Algeria in places such as Egypt, Iraq, Yemen, the Levant, and Turkey. Dr. ʿAlī al-Shābbī, himself belonging to the Shābbī family, describes (via Maḥfūẓ, 1998[e]: 123) the path of Aḥmad ibn Makhlūf al-Shābbī as a combination of mainstream Sunni Sufism (al-taṣawwuf al-sunnī) and the mystic philosophy of Muḥyī al-Dīn ibn al-ʿArabī (638/1164). For more on Aḥmad ibn Makhlūf al-Shābbī, see Maḥfūẓ (1994: keyword: "Aḥmad ibn Makhlūf al-Shābbī").

[315] Cf. Bearman et al. (2012: keyword: "al-Shābbī").

[316] Ghédira (1959: 268).

[317] For more on the Khaldūniyyah College, see Bearman et al. (2012: keyword: "al-Khaldūniyya al-Djamʿiyya").

In the biographical article "Essai D'Une Biographie D'Abū-l Qasim Al-Šabbi," Ameur Ghédira concludes that, based on verbal and written sources, one may summarize al-Shābbī's reading corpus into three main categories:[318]

1. **Classical Arabic literature**: In particular poetry of both known and lesser-known poets with a mystic or Sufi inclination.
2. **Modern Arabic literature** of the Syrian-Lebanese school, the works of Egyptian writers such as Aḥmad Shawqī (d. 1351/1932), Aḥmad Zakī Abū Shādī (1374/1955), Muḥammad Ḥusayn Haykal (d. 1376/1956), Ṭāhā Ḥusayn (d. 1393/1973), and poetry by the Mahjar movement, such as Khalīl Jibrān and Mīkhāʾīl Nuʿaymah (d. 1988).
3. **European literature** through Arabic translations and adaptions, in which one finds three reoccurring names: "Ossian,"[319] Goethe, and Lamartine.

From the above outline of al-Shābbī's probable readings and exposure to indigenous and foreign literature, one may gather that, in the case of Arabic literature, he had a much greater potential to attain a nuanced and augmented perspective on the tradition in question than on the European one. After all, the latter seems to have been narrowly focused on "Ossian," Goethe, and Lamartine, and limited to Arabic translations and adaptions. Ghédira's observations of al-Shābbī's readings of Arabic literature also showed a leaning toward Sufi poetry and we are here reminded of his own Sufi heritage from the paternal side of the family and the fact that he himself had reportedly attended Sufi gatherings in Tozeur.[320]

Concerning al-Shābbī's own perspective on literature, Mohamed-Salah Omri describes him as a rebel who rose up against the Arabic tradition, and – one could add – against the neo-classicists of his time, much like the preceding European Romantics who had rejected classicism. Omri further writes that:

[i]n poetry as in criticism, al-Shābbī needs to be understood within schools of thought and poetic composition known as *al-Dīwān*, *al-Mahjar*, and *Apollo* […] He was a poet's

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[318] See Ghédira (1959: 269). Cf. Meisami and Starkey (1998: keyword: "Abū 'l-Qāsim al-Shābbī").
[319] James Macpherson (d. 1769) is the original author and publisher of *The Poems of Ossian* (1760).
[320] Meisami and Starkey (1998: keyword: "Abū 'l-Qāsim al-Shābbī").
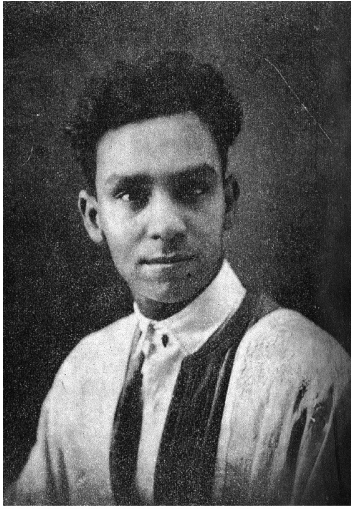
al-Shābbī in year 1930

poet, rather like the French Arthur Rimbaud, keenly conscious of his mission as poet and as visionary.[321]

The Dīwān group (*Jamāʿat al-dīwān*), unlike their intellectual inheritors, the Apollo (*Abūllū*) group (linked to the journal *Abūllū*), who were more ideologically inclusive, objected to the neo-classicist or revivalist school and openly challenged its adherents.[322]

The Dīwān group generally refers to an alliance of Egyptian poets that consisted of the trio ʿAbd al-Raḥmān Shukrī (d. 1378/1958), Ibrāhīm ʿAbd al-Qādir al-Māzinī (d. 1368/1949), and ʿAbbās Maḥmūd al-ʿAqqād (d. 1383/1964), whose school of thought and literary output was greatly influenced by English literature. Perhaps not unsurprisingly, unlike the American Mahjar movement, they did not advocate for or pioneer in the adaption of indigenous non-canonical poetical forms, like the Andalusian post-classical stanzaic *muwashshaḥ* (or *muwashshaḥah*).[323]

Putting the common belief about the radical thought of al-Shābbī aside, the fluctuating degrees of reformist and revivalist thought found in the three groups, in relation to which he presumably ought to be understood, together with his ternary readings that give the image of an open literary mind, nevertheless makes it difficult to place him on any extremity of a spectrum based on a neo-classisist/reformist polarity.

Although al-Shābbī may have reached an almost legendary status in the collective memory of the cultured Arab world, and his poetic impact remains unquestionable, the quantity of his literary output is quite modest in relation to his status. Omri counts the poems of al-Shābbī as being just above one hundred.[324] The primary reason for this is most probably the poet's short life and the cardiac disorders that he suffered from in the last years of his life, leading to his death at

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[321] In Meisami and Starkey (1998: keyword: "Abū 'l-Qāsim al-Shābbī").

[322] Meisami and Starkey (1998: keyword: "Dīwān Group") and Fleet et al. (2014: keyword: "Dīwān Group").

[323] Refer to Fleet et al. (2014: keyword: "Dīwān Group"). For more on the *muwashshaḥah*, see Bearman et al. (2012: keyword: "muwashshaḥ").

[324] Meisami and Starkey (1998: keyword: "Abū 'l-Qāsim al-Shābbī").

the young age of 25 on 9 October 1934 (29 Jumādá al-Thānī 1353AH). From his productions, in both prose and verse, we find titles such as:[325]

- *Aghānī al-ḥayāh* ('Chants of Life') (*dīwān*/poetry)[326]
- *Ṣafaḥāt dāmiyyah* ('Bloody Pages') (short story)
- "al-Khayāl al-shiʿrī ʿinda al-ʿarab" ('The Poetic Imagination Among the Arab') (literary criticism)[327]
- Several well-known poems that first were published in literary journals, for example:
  - "Ilá ṭughāt al-ʿālam" ('To the Tyrants of the World')[328]
  - "Irādat al-ḥayāh" ('The Will of Life')[329]
  - "Ṣalawāt fī haykal al-ḥubb" ('Prayers in the Temple of Love')[330]
  - "al-Jannah al-ḍāʾiʿah" ('The Lost Paradise')[331]
  - "al-Ṣabāḥ al-jadīd" ('The New Morning')[332]

As a closure to this brief biography of al-Shābbī, one may cite his two probably most widely known and oft-recited lines of poetry, taken from the opening of the poem "Irādat al-ḥayāh" ('The Will of Life') (*mutaqārib*), which today can be found in the national anthem of Tunisia:

<div dir="rtl">

إذا الشعب يوماً أراد الحياة   فلا بد أن يستجيب القدر

ولا بد لليل أن ينجلي   ولا بد للقيد أن ينكسر[333]

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[325] For a comprehensive bibliography, refer to the Complete Works project, *Mawsūʿat al-Shābbī*, by Karrū (1999).

[326] This collection of al-Shābbī's poetry was a project initiated by the poet himself, but one that he never had the opportunity to complete himself before his death in 1934. It was posthumously published in 1955 by Dār al-Kutub al-Sharqiyyah (Egypt), after which it has been republished several times (Maḥfūẓ, 1994b: 131). See, for example, the Dār al-ʿAwdah edition (Beirut) from 1972 and a newer edition of the collection from 2017, published by Dār al-Dajlah Nāshirūn wa-Mawzūʿūn (Amman).

[327] One of his more renowned essays on literary criticism, which was first published in the literary journal *Abūllū* in 1933[a].

[328] *Abūllū*, No. 9 (May 1934[a]): 810.

[329] *al-Hilāl*, No. 3 (January 1935): n.p..

[330] *Abūllū*, No. 8 (April 1933[b]): 848-851.

[331] *Abūllū*, No. 9 (May 1933[c]): 1022-1025.

[332] *Abūllū*, No. 5 (January 1934[b]): 388.

[333] al-Asmar (2012: 84).

When the people one day will to live,

then certainly fate will respond

The night will dispel,

and the chains shall be shattered.

Muḥammad al-Bashrūsh

Muḥammad ibn Muḥammad ibn Ḥamadah ibn Muḥammad al-Bashrūsh was born on 21 April 1911 (21 Rabīʿ al-Thānī 1329AH) in the town of Dar Chaabane (Dār al-Shaʿbān al-Fihrī), part of the Nabeul Governorate (Wilāyat Nābil), situated on the coast of Cape Bon in northeastern Tunisia.

al-Bashrūsh received his primary education in his hometown, and just like al-Ḥulaywī, he furthered his studies at the teacher training college in the capital after graduating. Like his friend, al-Bashrūsh thus also sought the educational path in terms of profession. He was later dispatched by the Department of Sciences and Knowledge (Idārat al-ʿUlūm wa-al-Maʿārif) as a teacher of Arabic to several places in the country.[334] He was first sent to teach in the Kerkannah Islands (Tun. Ar. Qarqnah) in the Gulf of Gabès on the east coast. After approximately one year, he moved south to the Djerid region (al-Jarīd), and more specifically, to the town of Nefta (Nafṭa) in the Tozeur Governorate.

He stayed in the Djerid for about three years, and it is allegedly during this stay that he made several important acquaintances among the litterateurs of the region – Abū al-Qāsim al-Shābbī being one of them, with whom he developed a close friendship.[335] He also got to know the writers Muḥammad al-Ṣāliḥ al-Mahīdī (d. 1388/1969) and Ibrāhīm Būʾrigʿah (d. 1403/1982), and the writer and poet Muṣṭafá Khrayyif (d. 1386/1967). As Maḥfūẓ suggests, these personalities came to act as gateways into the world of literary papers and journals for al-Bashrūsh.[336]

After his three years in Djerid, he continued to El Krib (al-Krīb), close to El Kef (al-Kāf) in the northwest of the country, where he was assigned to work for another three years within the school administration. As a last destination in his teaching profession, he was appointed as a teacher of Arabic and French in the coastal town of Hammamet (Ḥammāmāt) on the southeast side of Cape Bon.[337]

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[334] Maḥfūẓ (1994: keyword: "al-Bashrūsh") and Fontaine (1999: 220).
[335] Maḥfūẓ (1994: keyword: "al-Bashrūsh") and Fontaine (1999: 220).
[336] Maḥfūẓ (1994: keyword: "al-Bashrūsh").
[337] Maḥfūẓ (1994: keyword: "al-Bashrūsh") and Fontaine (1999: 220).
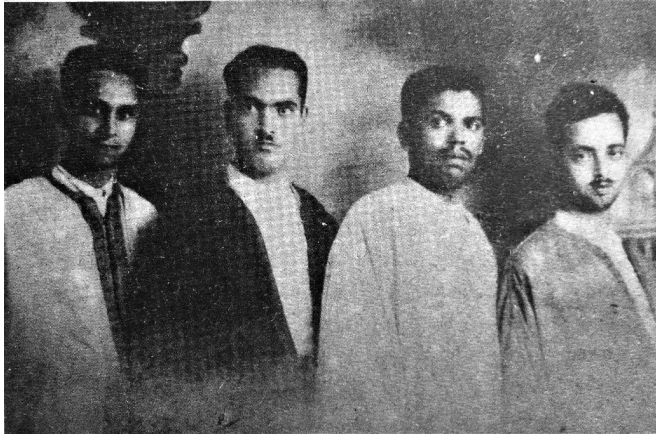
Young al-Bashrūsh and friends in the year 1927.[338] *From left to right: al-Shābbī, al-Bashrūsh, al-Mahīdī, and Khrayyif*

al-Bashrūsh's profession as a teacher does not seem to have inhibited his own literary pursuits, in which he assumed the pen-name "ʿAbd al-Khāliq."[339] In 1938, he founded one of the most important Tunisian literary journals in his time, *al-Mabāḥith* ('Investigations') (1938-1947), the circulation of which even reached outside the country. Based on the guide to periodicals published in Tunisia from 1838 to 20 March 1956, published by Bayt al-Ḥikmah (1989, Tunis), *al-Mabāḥith* reached an above-average circulation (2000) of 7000 in the year 1947.[340] However, within the first year of its foundation, only two issues of the journal were published before its publication temporarily ceased – probably due to financial constraints,[341] lack of moral support, or other pressing responsibilities outside of the journal.[342]

Together with the author and politician Maḥmūd al-Masʿadī (d. 1425/2004), the writer and linguist ʿAbd al-Wahāb Bakkīr (d. 1426/2005), Ḥabīb Farḥāt (n.d.), the journalist and politician Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn al-Talātilī (d. 1430/2009), Maḥmūd al-Muhīriṣī (n.d.), and Professor Muḥammad al-Suwīsī (d. 1428/2007), al-Bashrūsh finally reinitiated *al-Mabāḥith* in April 1944, before he passed away due to illness on 20 November in the same year. After the death of al-Bashrūsh, al-Masʿadī took over his position as editor-in-chief.

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[338] Salāmah (1978, front matter).
[339] Maḥfūẓ (1994: keyword: "al-Bashrūsh").
[340] See Ḥamdān (1989: 112-113). Also referred to in Omri (2001: 96, fn. 7).
[341] It has been stated that al-Bashrūsh financially supported his journal at his own expenses. See Salāmah (1978: 49) and Dāwud (2003: 8).
[342] Refer to Salāmah (1978: 49-50) and Omri (2001: 95, fn. 6).

The journal had all along been multi-focused and incorporated a range of subjects, and thus, somewhere along the way, it earned the full name of *al-Mabāḥith fī al-adab wa-al-fann wa-al-tārīkh wa-al-falsafah* ('Investigations in Literature, Art, History, and Philosophy').[343] Despite the apparent academic, humanist, and artistic orientation of its name, the journal had a revolutionary outlook in ideological, social, and political terms.[344] While its manifestations may have been purely intellectual, and at times perhaps subtle, it is important not to forget the generational circumstances in which the journal emerged. As Muḥammad al-Ṣāliḥ al-Jābirī stated in his study on Tunisian literature from 1974:

> *al-Mabāḥith* is the journal of the new generation which combined a solid Arabic background and a foreign culture learned at its roots. Most of its writers were graduates from French universities […] Their admiration for Western progress did not blind them to their authenticity. Their command of its science and grasp on its literature did not lead them away from their heritage and language. In fact, their acquired knowledge increased their belief in the capacity to develop and progress and to revive a viable Tunisian literature in order to convince those who doubt its existence or those who may have been discouraged.[345]

In connection to al-Jābirī's reading of *al-Mabāḥith*, one may further recall the founder's own words, when he proclaimed this kind of "rootedness" in the realities – whether imaginary, psychosocial, or actual – of the past and the present. In the ninth issue of the year 1944, he solemnly acknowledged that:

> I see it as my duty to be faithful to the memory of Ibn Rashīq, Ibn Sharaf, Ibn Khaldūn, Ibn Hānī, and al-Shābbī. They have eternalized with their works the spirit of Arabic civilization and culture in this country. I see it as my duty to preserve the seeds they planted with my blood, heart, and mind. I feel solidarity with past generations of my nation; and I would consider myself a traitor if I strayed from the spirit that made this nation a nation. The spirit that made me related to the human collective that necessitates life; life over which we have rights.[346]

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[343] See Omri (2001: 96).

[344] See Dāwud (2003)

[345] al-Jābirī (1974: 49-50), English translation from Omri (2001: 100, fn. 11).

[346] *al-Mabāḥith*, No. 9 (December 1944) via Salāmah (1978: 5). English translation based on Omri (2001: 98).

General picture of Dar Chaabane (1950), al-Bashrūsh's hometown[347]

The most complete bibliography of al-Bashrūsh to date can be found in *Muḥammad al-Bashrūsh, ḥayātuhu wa-āthāruh* ('Muḥammad al-Bashrūsh: His Life and Legacy') by ʿAbd al-Ḥamīd Salāmah.[348] The work of Salāmah provides not only insights into the life of al-Bashrūsh, but as a reader it also gives an important overview of his many professional and literary productions, the majority of which had to be rediscovered.[349] Salāmah divides the total written production of al-Bashrūsh into thirteen categories:[350]

1. Essays on the Short Story (*al-kitābah fī al-qiṣṣah*) (3 pcs.)
2. Short Stories (Original) (*al-qiṣas*) (7 pcs.)
3. Literary Criticism (*al-naqd*) (11 pcs.)
4. Poetry (*al-ashʿār*) (6 pcs.)
5. Tunisian Literature (*fī al-adab al-tūnisī*) (2 pcs.)
6. Studies on Literary Personalities (*buḥūth mukhtalifah ḥawla shakhṣiyyāt adabiyyah*) (13 pcs.)
7. Miscellaneous Studies (*dirāsāt ḥawla mawāḍīʿ mukhtalifah*) (9 pcs.)
8. Articles on Culture, Journalism, and Print and Publishing (*maqālāt ḥawla al-thaqāfah wa-al-ṣaḥāfah wa-al-ṭibāʿah wa-al-nashr*) (9 pcs.)
9. Translations (*al-mutarjamāt*) (18 pcs.)
10. Teaching and Education (*fī shuʾūn al-tarbiyah wa-al-taʿlīm*) (3 pcs.)
11. Book Preludes (*taqdīm al-kutub*) (6 pcs.)

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[347] Image from *Wikimedia Commons* (Retrieved: 2019-02-14).
[348] Salāmah (1978).
[349] See Salāmah (1978:137).
[350] Salāmah (1978: 478-483).

12. Miscellaneous Topics (*mawāḍīʿ mukhtalifah*) (3 pcs.)
13. Letters Published for the First Time (*rasāʾil tunsharu li-awwal marrah*) (7 pcs.)[351]

A few example of his literary output from the above categories are:[352]

- *al-Ḥayāh al-fikriyyah al-maghribiyyah min aqdam al-ʿuṣūr ilá al-ān* ('Maghribine Thought from Ancient Times to Now')[353]
- "al-Aṣnām al-thalāthah" ('The Three Idols') (literary criticism)[354]
- "Andirsān ANDERSEN al-danimārkī" ('Andersen the Dane') (biography: literary personalities)[355]
- "Tārīkh al-adab al-tūnisī qabla al-islām" ('The History of Tunisian Literature before Islam') (literary history)[356]
- "Nafs al-Shābbī" ('The Spirit of al-Shābbī')[357]
- Short stories that were published in the journals *al-ʿĀlam al-adabī* and *al-Mabāḥith*,[358] for example:
  o *Istiʿbād al-banīn* ('The Enslavement of Sons')[359]
  o *Zawjat Aḥmad Sharūdah* ('The Wife of Aḥmad Sharūdah')[360]
  o *Fannān* ('Artist')[361]
- *Khawāṭir mujannaḥah* ('Winged Thoughts') (prose poetry)[362]

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[351] These letters were provided to Salāmah by al-Ḥulaywī himself and stretch over the period 16 March 1935 – 1977 (*circa*). See Salāmah (1978: 453-467). As indicated by the heading, these seven letters are not included in *Rasāʾil al-Shābbī* (1966) by al-Ḥulaywī.

[352] See Salāmah (1978) and Maḥfūẓ, (1994[c]: 106-107).

[353] Maḥfūẓ, (1994[c]: 106-107).

[354] Published as a serial of five parts in *al-Zamān* ('Time') No. 144 (December 1932) – No. 155 (November 1932). See Salāmah (1978: 194-222).

[355] *al-ʿĀlam al-adabī*, No. 5 (July 1930): 24. See Salāmah (1978: 289-292).

[356] Published as a serial in the journals *al-ʿĀlam al-adabī* and *al-Zamān* between March 1935 and March 1936. See Salāmah (1978: 251-285).

[357] A eulogizing manuscript speech published in two parts in *al-ʿĀlam al-adabī*, No. 2 (September 1934) (p. 21) and No. 4 (June 1935) (p. 6). See Salāmah (1978: 300-308). The speech was given 1934 in connection to the commemoration of al-Shābbī.

[358] See Salāmah (1978: 153-188) and Maḥfūẓ, (1994[c]: 106).

[359] *al-ʿĀlam al-adabī*, No. 7 (September 1930): 18. See Salāmah (1978: 153-188).

[360] *al-ʿĀlam al-adabī*, No. 5 (April 1932): 5. See Salāmah (1978: 164-168).

[361] *al-Mabāḥith*, No. 1 (January 1938): 14. See Salāmah (1978: 184-188).

[362] Published in *al-Thurrayā*, No. 3 (February 1944): 16. Refer to Salāmah (1978: 239-240) and Maḥfūẓ, (1994[c]: 106).

- "al-Adab al-tūnisī al-ḥadīth" ('Modern Tunisian Literature')[363]
- Translations, for example:[364]
  - Alphonse de Lamartine (d. 1869)
  - Théophile Gautier (d. 1872)
  - Gustave Flaubert (d. 1880)
  - Guy de Maupassant (d. 1893)
  - Paul Verlaine (d. 1896)

The thematic characteristics and literary style found in the fictional work of al-Bashrūsh are marked by literary realism and – within the Tunisian context – he has been described as both an advocate of this school and one of its pioneers.[365]

Moreover, al-Bashrūsh was also of the opinion that Arabic literature was in dire need of the short story (*al-qiṣṣah*),[366] of which the indigenous tradition knew no predecessor nor any equal to that found in French literature.[367] However, as pointed out by Salāmah,[368] this opinion of al-Bashrūsh may be highly problematized, since it essentially is based on an anachronistic and decontextualized juxtaposition between the modern Western short story and the traditional Arabic story (or storytelling). Thus, in effect, a non-Western literary phenomenon is being measured against a Western concept or literary categorization, which is rather desperately used to rationalize the former indigenous genre, in spite of its being contrary to its literary tradition and development.[369] As a result, the differences usually appears as shortcomings of the former, as seems to be the case with al-Bashrūsh.

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[363] This study was originally published in French in *l'Afrique Littéraire*, No. 25 (February 1944). It was later partially published in Arabic in the paper *al-Zahrah*, No. 10504 (March 1944). Refer to Salāmah (1978: 286-288).

[364] Refer to Salāmah (1978: 409-413) and Maḥfūẓ (1994: keyword: "al-Bashrūsh").

[365] See ʿAzzūnah (1995: 29) and Fontaine (1999: 221). Cf. Salāmah (1978: 61).

[366] It should be noted that the term *qiṣṣah*, for al-Bashrūsh, refers to both the short story (Fr. *nouvelle*) and the novel (Fr. *roman*). However, in this specific context, the short story (*nouvelle*) is what is intended by the term. Refer to Salāmah (1978: 61-62).

[367] Refer to al-Bashrūsh's article "al-Qiṣṣah fī al-adab al-ʿarabī" in Salāmah (1978: 141-145). First published in *al-ʿĀlam al-adabī*, No. 13 (June 1932) (p. 3).

[368] Salāmah (1978: 62-63).

[369] Here, Thomas Bauer's (2007: 151) question seems to be on point: "Has anybody ever questioned the value of English literature on account for its failure to develop the genres of *maqāmah* and *badīʿīyah*?" For an up-to-date discussion on this subject matter, see Bauer (2007), Omri (2008), and Allen (2011). Cf. Salāmah (1978: 62-63).

While being a proponent of the idea of "*l'art pour l'art*" ('Art for art's sake'),[370] al-Bashrūsh nevertheless advocated for the Arabic short story to be firmly grounded in an Eastern social reality and clearly ascribed to it an activist cause. His own short stories incorporate social criticism through satirical modes of humor and irony and portray subject matters relevant for his time, such as the rural exodus, the corrupt relationship between men and women, superstition, forced marriages, and extravagant dowries (*mahr*).[371] In the article "al-Qiṣṣah fī al-adab al-ʿarabī" ('The Short Story in Arabic Literature'), published in *al-ʿĀlam al-adabī* in the year 1932,[372] al-Bashrūsh writes quite radically that:

> By God, only the short story is capable of depicting life. If we desire the rise of the short story, then we are also intent on keeping the strongest connection to life and maintaining the clearest understanding and perception of it. If we desire life, then we also desire everything that we wish from life, since life is the enemy of mannerism [*al-takalluf*] and fabrication [*al-iftiʿāl*]. […] Indeed, the short story has arable soil to grow and thrive in the East. And if we [in our writing] want to [falsely] alter this East, then we certainly ask for fabrication and, as a result, the short story no longer has any reality to it as long as we deny our "Easternness" [*sharqiyyatanā*] and put ourselves aside.[373]

6.1.2 The Exiled Scholar in Illigh of Morocco and his Correspondents

The three correspondences that were sampled from *al-Illighiyyāt* stretch over an eight-year long period, starting in November 1937 and ending in August 1945. Just like the letters found in *Rasāʾil al-Shābbī*, these correspondences took place during the country's pre-independence period (1912-1956). Most notable is perhaps the fact that the correspondences coincided with the whole of the Second World War (1939-1945). It was also during this period that the country's chief nationalist conservative and anti-colonialist party, the Istiqlāl Party (*Ḥizb al-istiqlāl*, 'Independence Party') (est. 10 December 1943), was formed, with the politician and writer ʿAllāl al-Fāsī (d. 1394/1974) as its most important leader, and the former Prime Minister and Sorbonne graduate, Aḥmad Balāʾfrīj (d. 1410/1990), as its secretary general.

With its urban mass mobilizing factor, the Istiqlāl Party marked the beginning of a new current within the Moroccan nationalist struggle against the colonial powers, bringing the struggle out from the exclusive cliques of young Moroccan

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[370] See Salāmah (1978: 63-64).
[371] See Salāmah (1978: 65-67), al-Naftī (1995), and Fontaine (1999: 221).
[372] *al-ʿĀlam al-adabī*, No. 13 (June 1932): 3. See Salāmah (1978: 141-145).
[373] From Salāmah (1978: 144-145).

intellectuals with a modern or traditional religious education, and turning it into a popular political force.[374]

The Istiqlāl Party is still active today and has been a major oppositional party. The party came about as a melding of the Nationalist Movement (*al-Ḥarakah al-qawmiyyah*) and the Nationalist Party for Reform (*al-Ḥizb al-waṭanī li-taḥqīq al-maṭālib*, 'the Nationalist Party for the Realization of Demands') that emerged after the arrest and disbanding of the Moroccan bloc for national action (*Kutlat al-ʿamal al-waṭanī al-maghribiyyah*) (est. 1933) in the spring of 1937. The Istiqlāl Party consisted of leaders from nationalist movements (including ʿAllāl al-Fāsī and Aḥmad Balāʹfrīj) and may be described as Morocco's first political party.[375]

Although contradictory accounts of the movement's methods of resistance exist, it seems that non-violent forms of protest were organized in the majority of cases and a focus was laid on running a global anti-colonial campaign that also involved a diplomatic mission to the United Nations in New York in the form of permanent representation.[376]

The riots that followed the writing of the Istiqlāl Party's manifesto on 11 January 1944 (14 Muḥarram 1363), which was presented to Sultan Muḥammad V (d. 1381/1961) and demanded the country's full independence from the colonial powers,[377] not only had effects on the party's development, but also made them subject to French political persecution.[378]

During this formative stage of Moroccan nationalism, one must not forget to mention the previous meeting between President Franklin D. Roosevelt (d. 1945) and Sultan Muḥammad V at the Anfa (Anfā) Hotel during the Casablanca conference between 14 and 24 January 1943, at which Winston Churchill (d. 1965) and the leader of the Free French Forces (*Forces françaises libres*), Charles de Gaulle (d. 1970), were also present. While no record of the actual words that were exchanged between the parties exists, the meeting ignited hope for the nationalist struggle and became a pivotal step toward the alliance between the Moroccan nationalist movement and the Royal Palace.[379] Of course, both parties would have deemed such an alliance beneficial, the Sultan lending legitimacy and authority to

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[374] Zisenwine (2010: 9, 31-32), De Poli (2016: 33), and Fleet et al. (2014: keyword: "Istiqlāl Party").

[375] See Halstead (1967: 269), Joffé (1985: 293), Mazrui and Wondji (1998: 60), and Bearman et al. (2012: keyword: "ʿAllāl al-Fāsī").

[376] See Fleet et al. (2014: keyword: "Istiqlāl Party"). Cf. Zisenwine (2010: 31).

[377] For the full manifesto (in French), see Halstead (1967: appx. E).

[378] Zisenwine (2010: 52).

[379] Joffé (1985: 289, 302) and Pennell (2000: 262-263).

the nationalist cause through his symbolic and political status as a Sharifian[380] and the leader of the Moroccan (Muslim) community, while the approval and support of the nationalist movement, in turn, could uphold the dynastic interests of the Sultan.[381]

The following excerpt from *The Challenge (Le défi)* (1976), the memoirs of King Hassan II, who at the time of the Casablanca Conference was fourteen years old, might illustrate how his father, Sultan Muḥammad V, understood the words that were exchanged during the meeting:

> The President [Roosevelt] said he thought the colonial system was out of date and doomed. Winston Churchill considered this too outright a statement. He [Churchill] also pointed out that after the French conquest of Algeria, Great Britain had been 'the guardian of the integrity of the Cherifian Empire' for half a century. In short, he tried to gloss it over.

> Roosevelt replied that this was not 1812, or even 1912. He foresaw a time after the war – which he hoped was not far off – when Morocco would freely gain its independence, according to the principles of the Atlantic Charter. After the war, he said, the politico-economic situation of human society must be reorganised. The United States would not put any obstacle in the way of Moroccan independence; on the contrary, they would help us with economic aid.[382]

The French colonial regime implemented the code of the *indigénat*, a French native policy, which restricted the basic rights of the indigenous population in French colonies.[383] The discriminatory measures that the code of the *indigénat* entailed seriously affected several fundamental liberties of Moroccans. Civil, vocational, personal, and political rights and freedoms were controlled and restrained. There seem to have been three main discriminatory restrictions that the adherents of the nationalist movement in particular found intolerable, and which had significant consequences for their campaign and organization: press censorship, imprisonment and punishment, and constrained freedoms of association and organization.[384] When taken in political and vocational forms, discrimination mainly involved repressing and constraining measures of indigenous

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[380] *Sharīf* (pl. *shurafāʾ*; *ashrāf*) (lit. 'noble; high-born; honorable'), an honorific title for those of noble descent, and particularly the descendants of the Prophet Muḥammad. Refer to Wehr (1979: keyword: "sharufa").

[380] al-Sūsī (2015, pt. 3: 109).

[381] Joffé (1985: 303).

[382] Hassan II (1978:31). This passage is also quoted in Pennell (2000: 263).

[383] Refer to Irele and Jeyifo (2010: keyword: "colonialism").

[384] Halstead (1967: 52-54, 58-59).

representation in the Residency, which, as a result, primarily protected the interests of the colonial settlers and their representatives.[385]

Similarly to the pre-independence situation of other French colonies, such as Tunisia and Algeria, the Moroccan press was harshly regulated and, before 1910, primarily established and distributed by French authorities, despite being officially free.[386] While publications of papers in French required no more than a declaration of intent signed with or witnessed by a public prosecutor, with the reservation that they would be banned if deemed "harmful to the public order," papers in Arabic (or Hebrew) needed an authorization that was both hard to acquire and revocable (through vizierial decree).[387] That being said, some French and Spanish publishers and journalists clearly seemed to have seen the benefits of supplementing their papers with an Arabic edition of the entire issue or a part of it.[388] Moreover, and like the situation of the press in French Tunisia, the Resident-general (*Résident-général*), the effective ruler of the land, was able to ban the importation of publications from outside Morocco regardless of their language.[389]

These restrictions placed on the Moroccan press clearly indicate the kind of possible threat to the colonial power and its legitimacy that the press was perceived to pose. The nationalist and pro-independence press that began to emerge in the late 1930s thus had to keep its activities carefully underground up until Morocco's obtainment of independence in the year 1956.[390]

Muḥammad al-Mukhtār al-Sūsī

The scholar and politician Muḥammad al-Mukhtār ibn ʿAlī ibn Aḥmad al-Sūsī al-Illighī al-Darqāwī (1318-1383/1900-1963) may be described as having been both a prolific writer and an influential nationalist figure in the late pre-independence period of Moroccan history.[391] One may also remember him for having sought an intellectual and practical middle ground between Sufism and Salafism, traditionalism and modernism, and localism and trans-localism, in a time and space that had experienced the persuasive political currents of the endogenous

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[385] Refer to Halstead (1967: 50-51, 59-61). Cf. Pennell (2000: 215).

[386] See Halstead (1967: 54) and Dajani (2011: 54-56).

[387] Halstead (1967: 54).

[388] For example, the Arabic editions of *El Telegrama del Rif* (est. 1907) and the bi-monthly *L'Indépendance marocaine* (est. 1907). Refer to Bearman et al. (2012: keyword: "ḏjarīda").

[389] Halstead (1967: 54). Cf. Dajani (2011: 56).

[390] Dajani (2011: 56).

[391] See e.g. Boukous (1999: 113-123) and Chevallier (1995: 133-138).

and exogenous reformist movements in the second half of the 19th century and in the early 20th century,[392] and their reverberations.[393]

al-Sūsī was eventually thrown into exile in the year 1937 after a period of religious studies and personal contributions to the establishment of secret political societies and literary forums in Fez, Rabat, and Marrakech. The exile lasted about eight years; however, after resuming his activities in Casablanca, he was arrested and imprisoned from 1952 to 1954. al-Sūsī dedicated a good twenty-five years of his life to the Islamic sciences before he officially got involved in politics and, upon the country's independence, became Minister of Religious Affairs and eventually also a member of the Majlis al-Tāj (i.e. 'Ministry of the Crown') in the government of Muḥammad V of Morocco. He remained in this post up until the year 1963 when he died in a car accident.[394]

al-Sūsī was born in June 1900 in the village of Illigh, located in the southwestern part of the Anti-Atlas Mountains in the Sūs region of mid-southern Morocco. His family were of Amazigh (Berber) origin and are known for having upheld a century-long teaching tradition in Sufism.[395]

His father, Hajj ʿAlī ibn Aḥmad al-Sūsī al-Illighī al-Darqāwī (1268-1328/1851-1910), was considered one of the greater Sufi Shaykhs of the Darqāwiyyah order;[396] his *zāwiyah* (i.e. Sufi lodge) alone had thousands of disciples and students.[397] Hajj ʿAlī was well received and several *manāqib* (sg. *manqabah*), that

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[392] I.e. the modernist reformist, or revisionist, movement of early Salafism with Muḥammad ʿAbduh (1266-1323/1849-1905) as its foremost figure and the phenomenon generated through the cultural and intellectual contact between the East and the West (Europe), commonly known as the *nahḍah*, which included, not always uncritically or sweepingly, movements or calls for a modernism based on Western models (Bearman et al. [2012: keyword: "nahḍa"]).

[393] Cf. El-Adnani (2007) and Boukous (1999: 124-127).

[394] Refer to El-Adnani (2007: 41-42).

[395] See al-Zirkilī (2002, vol. 7: 92-93) and El-Adnani (2007: 42).

[396] The Darqāwiyyah or Darqāwah is a Sufi order with its origins in Morocco, but which has gained followers from both within and outside the Arab world. The order was founded in the 18th century by Mawlāy al-ʿArabī al-Darqāwī (d. 1239/1823) and is a branch of the Shādhiliyyah order of Abū al-Ḥasan al-Shādhilī (d. 656/1258). The Darqāwah path became popular across societal strata in Morocco and individuals of higher social or political status and even members of the ʿAlawī dynasty joined it (see Fleet et al. [2014: keyword: "Darqāwa"]). In addition to spiritual practices, in their early stages, they also developed a strong political agenda that manifested itself through, for example, their resistance to Ottoman forces in the Algerian province of Oran (1803-1809) and the alarming French infiltration. However, in the 20th century and during the time of French and Spanish colonialism (1912-1956), this spirit of resistance became somewhat ambivalent, fluctuating between cooperation and contestation (ibid).

[397] See al-Zirkilī (2002, vol. 7: 92-93) and El-Adnani (2007: 42).

is, laudatory biographical works,[398] have been written about him.[399] Hajj ʿAlī himself was also a writer and wrote works of both poetry and prose (in Arabic and in the Amazigh Tashelḥīt language[400]), such as:

1. *al-Mubdiʾ al-muʿīd, fī tarjamat shaykhinā Sīdī Saʿīd* ('Everything Conceivable Concerning the Life of our Shaykh Sīdī Saʿīd [d. 1300/*ca.* 1882]');
2. *Riḥlat al-ḥajj* ('The Journey of Hajj, the Pilgrimage'), consisting of 2000 verses (*abyāt*, sg. *bayt*) written in *rajaz*;[401]
3. Translations of *al-Ḥikam al-ʿaṭāʾiyyah* ('Ibn ʿAṭāʾ Allāh's Aphorisms'), by the Egyptian scholar and Sufi Shaykh Ibn ʿAṭāʾ Allāh al-Iskandarī (d. 709/1310), from Arabic to Tashelḥīt in verse.[402]

Thus, from an early age, al-Sūsī received a traditional kind of confessional education in the light of Sufi teachings, one in which he also mastered the Arabic language, which, after all, was not his first language. He later went on to pursue his studies in the religious sciences and literature not only in Sūs, but also in Marrakech, Fez, and Rabat, where he came into contact with the reformist

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[398] Due to its fluidity and equivocalness, it is hard to pinpoint the *manāqib* as a genre, or format, although as a practice it reaches back into pre-modern times. However, in simple terms, the word generally refers to biographical works of a eulogizing nature that highlight or encapsulate the virtues, character, and deeds of a person. For more on this particular biographical format, see Bearman et al. (2012: keyword: "manāḳib").

[399] For example, the two *manāqib* written by his prominent student, the religious scholar Muḥammad ibn ʿAlī al-Tādilī (d. 1372/1952), with the titles *Itḥāf al-khill al-wafī bi-mā yanbaghī fī tarjamat al-shaykh al-ḥājj ʿAlī al-Illighī* or *Itḥāf al-khill li-mā yanbaghī, min tarjamat sīdī al-ḥājj ʿAlī al-Illighī* ('The Due Gift of the Friend: the Biography of Sīdī Hajj ʿAlī al-Illighī') (published) and *al-Maʾmūl al-mabghī fī manāqib al-ḥajj ʿAlī al-Sūsī al-Illighī* ('The Desired Hope Concerning the Virtues of Hajj ʿAlī al-Sūsī al-Illighī') (manuscript). For these titles, see Ibn Sawdah (1997, vol. 1: 386) and Zirkilī (2002: 261, fn. 2), and for al-Tādilī, see Zirkilī (2002, vol. 6: 306).

[400] Tashelḥīt or Shilḥah (Mor. Ar. *shǝlḥah*) (endonyms: *tachelḥiyt* or *tasusiyt*) is an Amazigh language that is native to the people of the Sūs. Furthermore, in contrast to other Amazigh languages, Tashelḥīt is known to have, in addition, to an oral literary tradition, a continuous tradition of writerly culture that reaches as far as back as at least nine centuries into history. From the preserved corpus of manuscripts dating from the 16th century onwards, Nico van den Boogert asserts that Tashelḥīt was not commonly used in epistolary and documentary writing. This is also true for prosaic writing in general, verse written in Amazigh meters being the most utilized form when writing in Tashelḥīt. For more on Tashelḥīt, see Bearman et al. (2012: keyword: "tashelḥīt") and Chaker (2012: keyword: "chleuh"). On the literary tradition of the Sous region specifically, see Van Den Boogert (1996).

[401] A meter in classical Arabic poetry.

[402] Refer to Ibn Sawdah (1997, vol. 1: 386) and al-Marʿashlī (2006: 882).

movement and its key figures; in the course of time, he adopted their Salafist creed and was introduced to nationalist and Muslim political activist thought.[403] About these two apparently conflicting loyalties, Jillali El Adnani writes that:

> [w]riting a biography of Soussi means taking into account his affiliation with two networks, that is, the brotherhoods and the national movement. Like his father, he belonged to the Darqawiyya. Early on, however, he realized that his vocation lay not in mystics [i.e. mysticism] but in the exoteric sciences.[404]

In the opening of the first part of his book *al-Illighiyyāt*, al-Sūsī expresses the contradictory feeling of estrangement (*ghurbah*) that he felt when sent into exile from Marrakech to his hometown Illigh. The philosophical and ideological "shift" in perspective that he had undergone in the activist and religious milieus of the larger cities undoubtedly left him feeling like an outsider and a stranger in his original milieu in Illigh. From these opening lines, we may also gather that it was this feeling of estrangement that acted as the catalyst for writing *al-Illighiyyāt* in the first place:

> فرحنا تلك العشية إلى (إلغ) فوجدتني غريباً عمن هم أهلي وأقاربي. أجنبياً مبدءاً وفكراً وخلقاً. فرجعت إلى يراعي أستوحيه فكنت أقيد كل ما أوحي إلي به. كيفما كان. فكنت إذا جاش بي تذكر أخواني ب(مراكش) وزلزلني ما أنا فيه من الغربة ب(إلغ) ألقي بعض القصائد ألم فيها ببعض ذلك تلويحاً أو تصريحاً. [...] انهالت علي من أدباء ((إلغ)) قصائد يهنئونني فيها بالرجوع إلى مسقط الرأس أبدوا لي فيها ما لهم من الشعور الحي نحوي. يسلونني بذلك لينسوني أنني منفي. فكنت أجيب كلا بما تيسر. نظماً ونثراً. وأنا أستأنس بهم وبأدبهم وألتذ بمخاطبتهم. وقد مصح ذلك بعض ما ألم بي من القلق والضيق. ثم لما اجتمعت من كل ذلك قواف كثيرة ومقالات ومراسلات رأيت أن أجمع ذلك في مجموع خاص؛ أسميه ب(الإلغيات) فها هو ذا بين يديك أيها القارئ. وإنني لا أزال أنتظر اليوم الذي أرجع إلى (الحمراء) فأراجع فيه الحياة. وهل الحياة عندي إلا بين تلاميذي وأصحابي المراكشيين الأحرار؟[405]

> We left for Illigh that afternoon. I soon found myself to be an outsider to those who in reality were my close family and relatives. A foreigner in terms of principles, thought, and character. I thus returned to my pen, seeking inspiration

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[403] al-Zirkilī (2002, vol. 7: 92) and El-Adnani (2007: 43).
[404] El Adnani (2007: 43).
[405] al-Sūsī (2015, pt. 1: 5-6).

from it. Everything that occurred to me, I would write it down. Whatever it was. Whenever I was agitated by the memories of my brothers in Marrakech, or shaken by my feelings of estrangement in Illigh, I would recite poetry through which I could mutely signal or openly declare this state of mind. […] Poems written by the litterateurs of Illigh poured over me, in which they congratulated me on my return to my hometown. [406] In their poems, they expressed their unbroken feelings towards me, and with that, they tried to console me and make me forget that I was actually in exile. I used to reply to them, in either prose or poetry, with what I could at the time. I became accustomed to them and their curtesy and took delight in conversing with them. This certainly relieved some of the distress and straits that I suffered from.

Then, when from that I had gathered several poems, writings, and letters, I decided that I should put them together in one single collection that I would name "Writings from Illigh" [al-Illighiyyāt]. And here it is, Dear Reader, in your hands. Indeed, I still do wait for the day when I can return to Marrakech and rejoin life again. For what is life, for me, if not amongst my free and noble students and comrades in Marrakech?

In the bibliographical article "Dalīl muʾallafāt wa-makhṭūṭāt al-ʿallāmah Muḥammad al-Mukhtār al-Sūsī" ('A Guide to the Books and Manuscripts of the Scholar Muḥammad al-Mukhtār al-Sūsī'),[407] al-Sūsī's son, Riḍá Allāh ʿAbd al-Wāfī al-Mukhtār al-Sūsī, lists 151 titles under the headings of ten generic or classificatory categories, beneath which some examples have been added here:[408]

1. Encyclopedic work (al-jānib al-mawsūʿī);
   - al-Maʿsūl ('The Honeysweet: On Sūs and its People') (mawsūʿah/encyclopedia, 20 vols.)[409]
2. Literature and its arts (al-jānib al-adabī wa-funūnuh);
   - Bayna al-jumūd wa-al-juḥūd (orig. Bayna al-jumūd wa-al-mayʿ) ('Between Rigidity and Rejection' [orig. 'Between Rigidity and Fluidity']) (novel)[410]

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406 For this poetry, see the section "Tarḥīb (Illigh) bi-ibnihā al-manfī ilayhā" ('Illigh's Welcome of her Exiled Son') in al-Illighiyyāt (al-Sūsī, 2015, pt. 1: 88-111).

407 R. al-Sūsī (2005).

408 For a comprehensive list of all al-Sūsī's published and unpublished work refer to R. al-Sūsī (2005).

409 First published in 1961 by Matbaʿat al-Jāmiʿah (Casablanca). For a newer edition see the Dār al-Kutub al-ʿIlmiyyah edition from 2014 (Beirut).

410 Published as a serial in the first year of the Moroccan journal Daʿwat al-ḥaqq ('The Truth's Call') between November 1957 and June 1958.

- *Nahḍat Jazūlah al-ʿilmiyyah wa-al-dīniyyah aw madāris Sūs wa-al-ʿulamāʾ alladhīna darrasū fīhā* ('The Intellectual and Religious Awakening of Gzoula' or 'The Schools of Sūs and the Scholars Who Taught in Them') (novel)[411]
- *Risālat al-shabāb* ('The Youth's Manifest') (novel)[412]
- *Sūs al-ʿālimah* ('Sūs, the Enlightened') (literary history)[413]
- *Naḍāʾid al-dībāj fī al-murāsalāt bayna al-Mukhtār wa-al-Qabbāj* ('Cushions of Brocade: The Correspondences between al-Mukhtār and al-Qabbāj') (epistolarium)[414]

3. Biographical work (*jānib al-tarājim wa-al-siyar*)
4. History (*al-jānib al-tārīkhī*);
5. Religion/Islam (*al-jānib al-dīnī*);
   - *Ḥāshiyat al-kashshāf lil-Zamakhsharī* ('A Commentary on *The Revealer* by al-Zamakhsharī')[415]
   - *al-Majmūʿah al-fiqhiyyah fī al-fatāwá al-sūsiyyah* ('A Collection of Fatwas from Sūs') (*fiqh*/Islamic jurisprudence)[416]
6. Memoirs (*jānib al-mudhakkirāt*);
   - *Muʿtaqal al-ṣaḥrāʾ* ('Prisoner of the Desert') (memoirs and *tarājim*, 2 vols.)[417]
7. Popular (folk) culture and heritage (*jānib al-thaqāfah al-shaʿbiyyah wa-al-turāth*)
8. Travel writings/travelogues (*jānib al-riḥlāt*);
   - *Khilāl Jazūlah* ('Through Gzoula') (*riḥlah*/travelogue, 4 vols.)[418]

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[411] The novel was published in 2012 by Matbaʿat al-Maʿārif al-Jadīdah (Rabat).

[412] Unpublished to this day.

[413] Published in 1960 by Matbaʿat Faḍālah (Mohammédia).

[414] Unpublished. The epistolarium contains the correspondence that took place between al-Sūsī and the Moroccan writer and scholar Muḥammad ibn ʿAbbās al-Qabbāj (1335-1399/1916-1979), which highlights their literary critical thought (refer to R. al-Sūsī, 2005: 4).

[415] A commentary, in the form of marginal notes, on the influential *tafsīr* (Quranic exegesis) by the Muʿtazilite scholar of Persian origin, Abū al-Qāsim Maḥmūd al-Zamakhsharī (d. 538/1144), with the title of *al-Kashshāf ʿan ḥaqāʾiq al-tanzīl* ('The Revealer of Revealed Truths'). For more on al-Zamakhsharī, see Bearman et al. (2012: keyword: "al-Zamakhsharī"). The commentary is stored in the library of the Scholars of Sūs League (Jamʿiyyat ʿUlamāʾ Sūs) (refer to R. al-Sūsī, 2005: 19).

[416] In this jurisprudential collection, al-Sūsī has gathered fatwas (sg. *fatwá*, pl. *fatāwá*), formal legal opinions, issued by later scholars from the Sūs region (see R. al-Sūsī, 2005: 19). The Faculty of Sharia at Ibn Zohr University (Agadir) published the collection in 1995.

[417] Published in 2011 by Matbaʿat al-Maʿārif al-Jadīdah (Rabat).

[418] Published in 1959 by al-Matbaʿah al-Mahdiyyah (Tétouan).

9. Lectures, sermons, and articles (*jānib al-muḥāḍarāt wa-al-khuṭab wa-al-maqālāt*)

10. Critical editorial work (*al-muʾallafāt allatī ḥaqqaqahā wa-hayyaʾahā lil-ṭabʿ*)

Ibrāhīm ibn Aḥmad al-Illighī

Not much information external to *al-Illighiyyāt* has been found on al-Sūsī's correspondent and first cousin, Ibrāhīm ibn Aḥmad ibn al-Ḥājj Ṣāliḥ al-Illighī. In addition to a short entry in the digital *Muʿjam al-Bābaṭīn li-shuʿarāʾ al-ʿarabiyyah fī al-qarnayn al-tāsiʿ ʿashar wa-al-ʿishrīn* ('al-Bābaṭīn's Dictionary of Arabic-Speaking Poets from the 19th and 20th Centuries'),[419] I have found that the most extensive biographical account on Ibn Aḥmad can be found in *al-Maʿsūl* ('The Honeysweet: On Sūs and its People'). In *al-Maʿsūl*, al-Sūsī presents a nine-page-long biography (*tarjamah*) of his cousin.[420]

Ibn Aḥmad was born in Dou Gadir (Dūkādīr) in Illigh in the year 1324AH (1906),[421] and thus we know that there was a relatively small age gap, of six years, between the two cousins. The manner in which al-Sūsī speaks about and addresses Ibn Aḥmad in *al-Illighiyyāt* suggests that he held some credentials that he had earned from either formal education or skillfulness in profession.

In the opening of a letter dated "1364 – 4 [*rabīʿ al-thānī*] – 26" (20 April 1944), al-Sūsī addresses his cousin with the honorific title "*al-ustādh al-kabīr ibn al-ʿamm*" ([To] The Great Master [*ustādh*], my cousin).[422] Moreover, the section dedicated to their correspondence also uses the heading "Conversations with the Master [*ustādh*] and Cousin Sidi Ibrāhīm ibn Aḥmad" (*Maʿa al-ustādh sīdī Ibrāhīm ibn Aḥmad ibn al-ʿamm*),[423] although it should to be noted that the honorific title of '*ustādh(ah)*,'[424] which traditionally and still today denotes a (school) master or master craftsman,[425] can also be used as a social recognition of

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[419] A digital project headed by the Abdulaziz Saud al-Babtain Cultural Foundation (Muʾassasat ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz Saʿūd al-Bābaṭīn). Via: http://www.almoajam.org. Direct link to the entry on Ibn Aḥmad: http://www.almoajam.org/poet_details.php?id=182 (Retrieved 2019-03-19).

[420] al-Sūsī (1961: 355-363).

[421] Refer to *Muʿjam al-Bābaṭīn* (keyword: "Ibrāhīm Murshid al-Illighī").

[422] al-Sūsī (2015, pt. 2: 237).

[423] al-Sūsī (2015, pt. 2: 209).

[424] The feminine singular form being *ustadhah* (pl. m. *asātidhah*, *ustādhūn*).

[425] As pointed out in *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, the term *ustādh*, from Pahlavi *awestād* ('master; craftsman'), is "used from early Islamic times onwards to denote a person eminent and skillful in his profession" (Bearman et al. [2012: keyword: "ustādh"]), which could range

an individual's moral and intellectual status or authority. Thus, the title does not necessarily have to be connected to the academic, or even professional, world, but can also tie in with cultural sentiments and interpersonal relations.[426]

When consulting the biographical sources, one learns that Ibn Aḥmad went through a traditional confessional education, similar to that of al-Sūsī. At an unspecified point in his life, Ibn Aḥmad started his educational journey by memorizing the Quran under his maternal uncle, the religious scholar and litterateur Sidi Mūsá ibn al-Ṭayyib al-Sulaymānī al-Illighī (d. 1361/1942).[427] After memorizing the Quran, he continued his studies within the traditional *madrasah* system for several years, inside and outside of the Sūs region, studying the religious and literary sciences (*al-ʿulūm al-sharʿiyyah wa-al-adabiyyah*).[428]

In *Maʿsūl*, al-Sūsī writes that Ibn Aḥmad did perfectly in grammar (*al-naḥw*) and overall was an excellent student who outperformed his peers.[429] While not denying that this might have been the case, one must nonetheless consider the laudatory and biased nature of such a statement. What is clear, however, is that al-Sūsī held his cousin in high regard when he wrote his biography.

At the age of about 31, after having studied literature under the tutorship of al-Sūsī in Marrakech, Ibn Aḥmad initiated his studies at the famous Qarawiyyīn Institute (al-Qarawiyyīn); he never completed these due to his business pursuits and disapproval of the institution's curriculum, but this is not elaborated on in the sources.[430] Furthermore, with regard to his linguistic abilities, it is worth noting what al-Sūsī writes about Ibn Aḥmad when he, at some point in time, arrived to see him in Marrakech. Here, we keep in mind that Arabic most probably was not his first language, but rather Tashelḥīt:

> I still remember that he used to apologize to me for not being good at colloquial Arabic [*al-ʿarabiyyah al-dārijah*]. Thus, I said to him: "Then, you should adhere to classical Arabic [*al-ʿarabiyyah al-fuṣḥá*]. But do not worry, soon enough you

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from craftsmanship or music to tutorship. The term also connotes that the same person is of exemplary moral authority. In its modern usage, the term is especially known as an academic title, in the sense of a university professor, as well as a high school teacher. See Wehr (1979: keyword: "ustādh") and Bearman et al. (2012: keyword: "ustādh").

[426] See Bearman et al. (2012: keyword: "ustādh").

[427] For more on Mūsá ibn al-Ṭayyib al-Sulaymānī, see Ḥajjī (2008: keyword: "Mūsá ibn al-Ṭayyib al-Sulaymānī").

[428] Refer to al-Sūsī (1961: 357-538) and *Muʿjam al-Bābaṭīn* (keyword: "Ibrāhīm Murshid al-Illighī").

[429] al-Sūsī (1961: 357).

[430] Refer to al-Sūsī (1961: 360) and *Muʿjam al-Bābaṭīn* (keyword: "Ibrāhīm Murshid al-Illighī").

will understand everything." This also turned out to be true, for not many years passed before he excelled in his language [ʿibāratih, lit. 'his expression'] and his strength for teaching became apparent.[431]

Sometime after 1932 or 1933, Ibn Aḥmad began teaching classical texts, such as *al-Murshid al-muʿīn* (The Guiding Helper'),[432] *Alfiyyat Ibn Mālik* ('Ibn Mālik's Poem in a Thousand Lines'),[433] and *al-Risālah* ('The Epistle'),[434] at the Bab Doukkala Mosque (Jāmiʿ Bāb Dukkālah) in Marrakech.[435] During his professional career as a teacher, he also taught for one year at Madrasat Tamanār ('The Tamanar School'), situated in the town Tamanar (Tamanār) in Essaouira Province (Iqlīm al-Ṣawīrah), between approximately 1945 and 1946. Around 1948 or 1949, Ibn Aḥmad was also appointed as the school director of Madrasat Ibn Karīr ('Ibn Karīr's School'), which was founded by Chieftain (qāʾid) al-ʿAyyādī of Rehamna (al-Raḥmānī) (d. 1384/1964).

Concerning their correspondence, al-Sūsī writes in the introductory paragraph to the section that:

طالت المكاتبة بيني وبين هذا الأستاذ منذ الخطوة الأولى إلى المنفى ثم امتدت ما شاء الله إلى السنة التي انحلت فيها العقدة فراجعت (الحمراء) وربما يقع الفتور في المكاتبة ولكنها لم تنقطع بالكلية. وسيسطر القلم الآن ما كان بيننا على تواريخه.[436]

The correspondence between this *ustādh* and me extended from my first step into exile up until the year in which this problem became unraveled and I returned to Marrakech. While our correspondence sometimes slackened, it never completely ceased. Now, the pen writes down what was exchanged between us chronologically.

As well as their correspondence extending over the exilic period, the honest and intimate nature of al-Sūsī's letters to Ibn Aḥmad further indicates al-Sūsī's

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[431] al-Sūsī (1961: 358).

[432] A wellknown didactic Maliki (*mālikī*) text in verse composed by the Moroccan jurist ʿAbd al-Wāḥid ibn ʿĀshir (d. 1040/1631). See Bearman et al. (2012: keyword: "mayyāra").

[433] Also known as *al-Khulāṣah al-alfiyyah* ('The One-Thousand-Lined Quintessence'), a renowned versification of Arabic grammar by the Arab grammarian from Jaén (Jayyān), Abū ʿAbd Allāh Jamāl al-Dīn Muḥammad al-Jayyānī (d. 672/1274), more commonly known as Ibn Mālik. For more on Ibn Mālik, see Bearman et al. (2012: keyword: "Ibn Mālik").

[434] A manual in Islamic jurisprudence according to the Maliki school of law by the North African scholar from Kairouan, Ibn Abī Zayd al-Qayrawānī (d. 386/996). See Fleet et al. (2014: keyword: "Ibn Abī Zayd al-Qayrawānī").

[435] al-Sūsī (1961: 359).

[436] al-Sūsī (2015, pt. 2: 209).

persistence in maintaining their contact and the kind of fraternal relationship that existed between the two letter writers, who were first cousins.

In the biographical entry on Ibn Aḥmad found in *al-Maʿsūl*, under the heading of "*Āthāruh*" ('His Works'), al-Sūsī mentions, and in some instances quotes, some of his cousin's writings in verse and in the form of letters. The reader is also informed that al-Sūsī possessed a collection of Ibn Aḥmad's poetry that seems to have been lost in some way, but which al-Sūsī promises to include in his literary collection (*majmūʿah adabiyyah*), *Jawf al-farā* ('The Belly of Onager')[437] (which remains unpublished today), if he were to find his cousin's poetry again.[438] Furthermore, al-Sūsī writes that the reason behind his wish to include Ibn Aḥmad in this collection is for the reader to know that his cousin can be counted amongst the greater litterateurs of Illigh.[439]

In *al-Maʿsūl*, three letters are sent: one undated, but seemingly complete, letter addressed to the poet al-Būʾnuʿmānī (d. 1403/1982) that Ibn Aḥmad wrote in Fez after having left Marrakech, and two additional undated letters, or fragments thereof, addressed to al-Sūsī, which seem to have been sent to him during his exilic period in Illigh.[440]

Six examples – of varying length – from Ibn Aḥmad's poetry are also included in the work:[441]

- "Mādhā yufīdu shabābuka l-fattān" ('What is it that avails your enchanting youth…')[442]
- "Ruzʾun ʿarā fa-aṣāba kulla fuʾād" ('A calamity descended and afflicted every heart…')[443]
- "Ará hādhī d-dunā taḍaʿu l-ʿiẓām" ('I see these predicaments bringing great misfortunes…')

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[437] The title of this literary collection alludes to the Arabic proverb "*Kull al-ṣayd fī jawf al-farā*" ('All the game is in the belly of the wild onager'). This proverb is used when one single person excels over several others and makes up for them. Refer to *Muʿjam al-maʿānī al-jāmiʿ* (keyword: "farā").

[438] al-Sūsī (1961: 363).

[439] al-Sūsī (1961: 363).

[440] See al-Sūsī (1961: 360-362).

[441] al-Sūsī (1961: 362-363).

[442] In this poem Ibn Aḥmad addresses Aḥmad Shawqī al-Dukkālī (d. n.d.) in an advisory manner. The poem is also included in *Khilāl Jazūlah* (al-Sūsī, 2015, pt. 2: 185).

[443] A poem that Ibn Aḥmad composed upon the incident in Marrakech, in Rajab 1356AH (September 1937), when the rebellion of the nationalists was suppressed by the troops of the French colonial regime. The poem is also found in *Khilāl Jazūlah* (al-Sūsī, 2015, pt. 2: 185).

- "Mā zurta illā balqaʿan wa-qifār" ('You visit but wastelands and deserts…')[444]
- "Kun kamā shiʾta fa-z-zamānu hanāʾ" ('Be as you like, as [the fate of] Time is auspicious…')[445]
- "Huwa d-dahru yaʾbá an anāla l-maʿālī" ('It is [the fate of] Time that denies me the noble things…')

Aḥmad al-Manjrah

The majority of information concerning al-Sūsī's correspondent, Aḥmad al-Manjrah, have been gathered from *al-Illighiyyāt*, where al-Sūsī – as with his other correspondents – has dedicated a special section to this friend with the heading of "*Maʿa al-akh mawlāy Aḥmad al-Manjrah*" ('Conversations with our Brother Moulay Aḥmad al-Manjrah'). The biographical details concerning al-Manjrah that I have been able to extract from this section remain very sparse.

صورة مولاي أحمد المنجرة الفاسي ثم المراكشي
Undated picture of al-Manjrah by the courtsey of R. al-Sūsī (2019-04-01)

We know that al-Manjrah was born around the year 1319AH (1901) and that he died around the year 1423AH (2002) at the great age of about 101 years. Furthermore, a junior high school situated in the rural commune of Zaïtoune (Zaytūn), in the northern province of Tétouan (Taṭwān), was named al-Thānawiyyah al-Iʿdādiyyah Mawlāy Aḥmad al-Manjrah ('Moulay Aḥmad al-Manjrah Junior High School') after this correspondent of al-Sūsī.[446] In the section dedicated to the correspondence that took place between al-Sūsī and al-Manjrah from the beginning of 1939 to the end of the year 1942, al-Sūsī opens with a direct address[447] to al-Manjrah, only to

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[444] This was supposedly uttered by Ibn Aḥmad when he travelled to Illigh in the year 1361AH (1942 or 1943) and did not encounter al-Sūsī there. The poem is also included in *Khilāl Jazūlah* (al-Sūsī, 2015, pt. 2: 160).

[445] The opening *bayt* (verse) is a borrowed line of poetry that I have not been able to identify. The poem is addressed to al-Maḥfūẓ ibn al-Ḥaḍramī (d. n.d.) and is included in *Khilāl Jazūlah* (al-Sūsī, 2015, pt. 2: 167).

[446] Confirmed through personal correspondence.

[447] It does not seem as if this was part of any real letter from al-Sūsī to al-Manjrah, but rather a pseudo-epistolary form utilized in the composition of this particular section in *al-Illighiyyāt*.

digress from it after four short paragraphs with a biographical segment about his friend.[448]

We learn that al-Manjrah, for al-Sūsī, was in the forefront of those who assisted him in opening Quranic schools (sg. *kuttāb*, pl. *katātīb*) that sought to incorporate into their traditional practice as much of the modern educational system as possible and the fundamentals of the sciences pertaining to the Arabic language. Thus, they soon developed into elementary schools (*madāris ibtidāʾiyyah*).[449] Although it appears that the majority of pupils belonged to poor families from impoverished areas of the country, al-Manjrah was also appointed as the supervisor of the private school Madrasat al-Ḥayāh ('School of Life'), which was established exclusively for children of eminent or distinguished personalities. In praise of al-Manjrah and his efforts to spread education, al-Sūsī writes:

فكان هذا الشريف الجليل يتحمل كل ما في طاقته من أعباء في هذا السبيل. رغم أشغاله التجارية الكبرى. فكم فتح من أعين. وأسمع من آذان. وجلا من عقول. وأدر من جيوب. ومد من دعاية واسعة يتوقف عليها ما أمكن أن يدرك في مثل تلك البيئة من نجاح. ثم هو مع كل هذا لا يتصدر. ولا يحب أن تشير إليه الأصابع. شأن كل العاملين بإخلاص يتموج في أثناء صدورهم المفعمة بالإيمان الذي هو الإيمان حقاً. وهل إيمان المسلم إلا ما ظهرت به أعمال.[450]

> For this cause, this great Sharifian [*al-sharīf al-jalīl*] man used to carry on his shoulders all that he could possibly manage. This, despite his many commercial activities. For how many eyes did he not open? How many ears did he not enable to hear and minds did he not polish? And how many pockets did he not make flow abundantly? How extensively did he not propagate, due to which the most feasible kind of success became achievable in such milieus? In spite of all of this, he never took a leading position nor did he wish to win the attention of people. This is the state of those who act with a kind of sincerity that surges in their hearts, which are filled to the brim with true faith. For what is the faith of a Muslim if not that which is manifested in his actions?

Concerning al-Manjrah's background and upbringing, al-Sūsī informs the reader that he traces his lineage back to the dynastic Saʿdian family (*al-saʿdiyyūn* or *banū*

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[448] The section containing the correspondence with al-Manjrah appears in the third part of *al-Illighiyyāt* (pp. 108-136). The introductory biographical segment takes up about four pages of the section (pp. 108-112).

[449] al-Sūsī (2015, pt. 3: 109).

[450] al-Sūsī (2015, pt. 3: 109).

Saʿd) that ruled Morocco from the mid-16th century to the year 1659. His father, al-Ṭāhir ibn Muḥammad al-Manjrah (d. 1367/1947), was a Sufi Shaykh who had gained followers and students.[451] Originally, Shaykh al-Ṭāhir al-Manjrah had taken his Sufism from the local saint ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz ibn Aḥmad al-Dabbāgh (d. 1321/1903), known as "Hazzu," who was affiliated with the Darqāwiyyah order.[452] After the death of his first teacher, al-Dabbāgh, al-Manjrah's father studied under another local saint in the vicinity of the northeastern mountain Jebel Zerhoun (Jabal Zarhūn), namely Shaykh Muḥammad ibn ʿAlī al-Wakīlī (d. 1332/1913 or 1914), who was well-known among the adherents of the path of the Darqāwiyyah.[453] Thus, just like his friend al-Sūsī, Aḥmad al-Manjrah was raised in a milieu that was highly colored by Sufi teachings and the religious sciences. At one point in his life, al-Manjrah studied at the Qarawiyyīn Institute; however, as al-Sūsī relates, the necessities of life eventually compelled him to take on commercial pursuits instead.[454]

To understand the kind of attachment al-Sūsī had to al-Manjrah and their friendship, one may find the following excerpt from the section that al-Sūsī dedicated to al-Manjrah quite telling:

<div dir="rtl">

كانت دار المولى أحمد المنجرة آخر دار رأيتها بـ(مراكش) قبل أن أغادر تلك المدينة صبيحة 28_12_1355ه فقد سمرت عنده مع أبي المزايا العلامة إبراهيم الكتاني. شقيق الروح إلى وسط الليل. فصاحبني إلى منزلي بـ(الرميلة) ثم ما استيقظت مبكراً حتى أخذت سيري إلى السيارة التي غربتني هذا التغريب الذي لا أزال فيه. أفلا يدل هذا الاتفاق الغريب على أن كل من في (الحمراء) يتصدر منزلتهم في الفؤاد هذا الخليل الذي هو آخر من وقعت عليه عيني ليلة النفي.[455]

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The home of Moulay Aḥmad was the last home that I saw in Marrakech before I left the city in the morning of the 28th of Dhū al-Ḥijjah 1355 [11 March 1937]. I had spent the evening before conversing at his place together with the scholar, and my spiritual brother, Abū al-Mazāyā Ibrāhīm al-Kattānī, up until midnight. Afterward, he [al-Manjrah] accompanied me back to my home in Rmila [al-Ramīla]. No sooner had I woken up in the morning than I was on my way to

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[451] See al-Marʿashlī (2006: keyword: "al-Ṭāhir ibn Muḥammad al-Manjrah") and al-Sūsī (2015, pt. 3: 111).

[452] Refer to al-Kattānī (2005: 41) and Ḥajjī (2008: keyword: "ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz ibn Aḥmad al-Dabbāgh Hazz").

[453] Refer to Ḥajjī (2008: keyword: "Muḥammad ibn ʿAlī al-Wakīlī").

[454] al-Sūsī (2015, pt. 3: 110).

[455] al-Sūsī (2015, pt. 3: 112).

the car that would send me into the exile in which I am still. Does this strange coincidence not show how this dear friend, who was the last person on whom I laid my eyes the evening before my exile, takes the first place in my heart, before all those who reside in Marrakech?

Additionally, al-Sūsī mentions how al-Manjrah used not only to support him morally, through words penned down in letters, but also monetarily.[456]

al-Ṭāhir ibn Muḥammad al-Īfrānī

On the 15th of Ṣafar in the year 1284AH (15 July 1867), al-Sūsī's third correspondent, al-Ṭāhir ibn Muḥammad al-Īfrānī (or al-Ifrānī),[457] was born in Oued Ifrane (Wād Ifrān), located in Ifrane Atlas-Saghir or Anti-Atlas (Ifrān al-Aṭlas al-Saghīr) in the Sūs region. It has been related that he belonged to the al-Bakriyyah family, and his lineage is thus traced back to the companion of the Prophet, Abū Bakr al-Siddīq (d. 13/634).[458]

Despite having the disadvantage of growing up as an orphan, al-Īfrānī managed to educate himself in the traditional religious sciences, including the Arabic language (al-lughah), the literary tradition (al-adab), Sufism (al-taṣawwuf), the science of Hadith (al-ḥadīth), and Islamic jurisprudence (al-fiqh).[459] After first having memorized the Quran in his hometown at the age of thirteen, al-Īfrānī later proceeded to a madrasah, Illigh al-Dūkādīr, located in Illigh. There, he studied under the founder of the school, Shaykh Muḥammad ibn ʿAbd Allāh al-Illighī (d. n/a), and the local Shaykh Hajj Muḥammad al-Yazīdī (d. n/a), amongst other prominent teachers.[460] He later continued to seek knowledge in the town of Taroudannt (Tārūdānt) in the Sūs, where he joined the study circle (ḥalqah) of one of the town's most recognized scholars, Shaykh Aḥmad ibn ʿAbd al-Raḥmān al-Jishtīmī (d. 1327/1909).

In the year 1888 or 1889, now in his early twenties, al-Īfrānī decided to travel to Fez, where he would spend eight more years advancing in the religious sciences, including Sufism. After his studies in Fez, he returned to his hometown, where he began to teach at the Tānkart madrasah, which his father once used to supervise. During this period many superior students of religious knowledge came to study under him, including al-Sūsī, whom he taught for a period of about four years.[461]

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[456] al-Sūsī (2015, pt. 3: 112).
[457] al-Sūsī seems to prefer the spelling 'al-Īfrānī'. See al-Sūsī (2015, pt. 3: 15).
[458] Refer to al-Hāṭī (n.d.).
[459] R. al-Sūsī (2016: 98-102) and Ḥajjī (2008: keyword: "al-Ṭāhir al-Ifrānī") and al-Hāṭī (n.d.).
[460] Refer to al-Hāṭī (n.d.).
[461] al-Hāṭī (n.d.).

Having reached the status of a Mufti, poet, and Sufi, the name of Shaykh al-Īfrānī soon spread to every corner of the Sūs region.[462]

al-Īfrānī is also remembered as a resistor of the colonial rule and, by means of correspondence, he himself acted as the coordinator between the revolt initiated by Aḥmad al-Hībah ibn Māʾ al-ʿAynayn (d. 1336/1919) in the Sūs and the uprising of the people in Tafilalt (Tāfīlālt) in southeastern Morocco.[463]

In the year 1955, al-Īfrānī passed away at the end of the holy month of the fast, Ramaḍān (May), having been bedridden for several years due to illness. He was buried in front of the Tānkart *madrasah*.

General view of present-day Ifrane Atlas-Saghir, the birthplace of al-Īfrānī[464]

The works of al-Īfrānī that have been managed to be identified are:

- *Naẓm al-ḥikam al-ʿaṭāʾiyyah* ('The Versification of Ibn ʿAṭāʾ Allāh's Aphorisms')[465]
- *Naẓm ʿibādāt al-mukhtaṣar* ('The Versification of the Chapter of Worship in *al-Mukhtaṣar*')[466]

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[462] Refer to Ḥajjī (2008: keyword: "al-Ṭāhir al-Ifrānī").
[463] Refer to al-Hāṭī (n.d.).
[464] Photo by Mohamed Arejdal (Muḥammad Arajdāl), khbarbladi.com (Retrieved: 2019-02-14).
[465] See al-Sūsī (1960: 209).
[466] See al-Sūsī (1960: 209). The book [*al-Mukhtaṣar*] that is referred to in the title is probably the very famous manual on *fiqh* (Islamic jurisprudence) according to the Maliki school of law, *Mukhtaṣar Khalīl* ('The Handbook of Khalīl'), by the Egyptian jurist Khalīl ibn Isḥāq al-Jundī (d. *ca.* 767/1365).

- *Naẓm al-risālah al-ʿaḍudiyyah* ('The Versification of ʿAḍud al-Dīn's Treatise')[467]
- A commentary (*sharḥ*) on one of his poems[468]
- A collection (*majmūʿah*) of his poetry[469]
- A literary output consisting of personal letters (*rasāʾil ikhwāniyyah*) (incl. letter poems), panegyrics, and metrical works on Sufism and Islamic jurisprudence (*fiqh*) that include fatwas (*fatāwá*), aphorisms (*ḥikam*), and devotionals (*ʿibādāt*).[470]
- Poems included in *Sūs al-ʿālimah* by al-Sūsī:
  - "Ayā nasmatu min nafḥi rīḥi ṣ-ṣabā rūḥī" ('Fragrant breeze of the eastern wind, leave…')[471]
  - "Tabassama thaghru l-barqi min jānibay Najd" ('The lightning brightly smiled from within Najd…')[472]
  - "Taʿāla ḥamāmu l-ghuṣni nabtaḥithu l-wajd" ('Come! Dove sitting on the branch, let us seek love…')[473]
  - "Daʿat lil-hawá baʿda ṣ-ṣabā aʿyunu l-ʿayn" ('After the eastern wind, the springs of water called to dissent…')[474]
  - "Fa-yā badra ufuqi d-dīni yā laytha ghābih" ('O' Moon in the horizon of the Religion, Lion of the woods…')[475]

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[467] See R. al-Sūsī (2016: 99-100). This is probably a versification of the didactic treatise *al-Risālah al-ʿaḍudiyyah* by the Shafiite (*shāfiʿī*) jurist and Asharite (*ashʿarī*) theologian ʿAḍud al-Dīn ʿAbd al-Raḥmān al-Ījī (d. 756/1355), from the Kurdish country of Shabānkāra in medieval Southern Persia. The treatise concerns itself with the traditional philological science *ʿilm al-waḍʿ* ("philosophy of language" or *sémantique* [Weiss, 1987: 339]) and debate (*munāẓarah*). For more on al-Ījī, see Bearman et al. (2012: keyword: "al-Īd̲j̲ī").

[468] See al-Sūsī (1960: 209).

[469] See al-Sūsī (1960: 209). The collection was compiled, however, in two volumes, first by al-ʿArabī al-Sāmūjnī and then by al-Īfrānī's own son Muḥammad ibn al-Ṭāhir.

[470] Refer to R. al-Sūsī (2016: 99-100).

[471] See al-Sūsī (1960: 113). The poem was found in a letter by al-Īfrānī, sent from Fez in 1313AH (1895 or 1896), to his Shaykh from Illigh, ʿAlī ibn ʿAbd Allāh.

[472] See al-Sūsī (1960: 114). This is a panegyric dedicated to someone by the name of al-Mawlá al-Ḥafīẓ.

[473] See al-Sūsī (1960: 114). This poem was composed in connection to the completion (*khatm*) of the recital of *Mukhtaṣar Khalīl*.

[474] See al-Sūsī (1960: 114). The poem is addressed to the leader of the resistance movement against the French colonial power, Aḥmad al-Hībah.

[475] See al-Sūsī (1960: 115-116). This poem is addressed to Shaykh Abū al-ʿAbbās al-Jishtīmī (d. 1327/1909).

7. The Analysis

The following part of this study is dedicated to the textual analysis of the primary material: the three sampled private correspondences from *al-Illighiyyāt* by Muḥammad al-Mukhtār al-Sūsī and the letter collection *Rasāʾil al-Shābbī* by Muḥammad al-Ḥulaywī.

The analysis is divided into "Segment One" (§ 7.1) and "Segment Two" (§ 7.2), which deal with the letters from *al-Illighiyyāt* and *Rasāʾil al-Shābbī* respectively. Thus, each sampling of letters s will be examined separately in order to allow the letter texts of these two works to speak for themselves as freely as possibly without being limited by the analytical material that the other group of letter texts generates.[476] Each segment includes a concluding section, in which the results of the analysis of each work are briefly summarized.

Here is also the place to briefly connect the two works, *al-Illighiyyāt* and *Rasāʾil al-Shābbī*, through some similarities. However, I will leave the more in-depth comparisons of similarities and dissimilarities and conclusions for the section "Conclusions and Discussion" (§ 8), since the reader will more readily digest such comparisons after first having read the analysis of each of these works.

The first major similarity between the sampled letter texts from *al-Illighiyyāt* and *Rasāʾil al-Shābbī* is the shared phenomenon of prosimetrum, that is, the combination of or alternation between prose and poetry within a text composition. However, the feature of prosimetrum is more prominent in al-Sūsī's correspondence. Another important similarity that occurs on more analogous terms is the letter writers' thematic and creative recycling and appropriation of both non-indigenous and indigenous[477] literary traditions – both what may be called modern and pre-modern or classical traditions.

I also found that the correspondences, despite their implicit ideological differences, are important sources for examining and construing diverse and complex constructions of masculinity and male bonding (homosociality) within an Arab(ic)-Islamic context; these concepts/notions are explained above (§ 5.3), and

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[476] See "Working Questions" (§ 5.4).

[477] Here, non-indigenous literary traditions are broadly understood as those conventions, genres, and works that originate or reside outside of the Arabic and/or Islamic literary contexts. For intertextuality as a key concept, see also § 5.2.2.

challenge monolithic narratives about gender. This particular subject will be discussed under the heading "Masculine Performances and Self-Making" in sections 7.1.4 and 7.2.7.

7.1 Segment One: *al-Illighiyyāt* ('Writings from Illigh')

The narrative discourse that mediates the story (the train of events) and the narrating (the action of narrating) of al-Sūsī's correspondence carries within it thematic and creative recycling and appropriations of both Arabic epistolary and literary traditions and what may be recognized as modern fictive and literary techniques. This analytical segment identifies and discusses such features of al-Sūsī's correspondence and places them in relation to the epistolary "I"-character and the discursive world of male experience(s) and the homosocial relationships that are formed and entertained therein.

7.1.1 The Setting, the Action, the Writer, and the Writing

In the universe of the epistolary "I," we sometimes – perhaps most of the time – find the letter writer writing at night in the quiet upper room of his residence in his hometown of Illigh. He may cease to write for a moment, to imagine the recipient(s) of his letter and their surroundings or to interact with his young son ʿAbd Allāh, his wife, Umm ʿAbd Allāh, or the unnamed housekeeper. In this Bedouin room, as he calls it, we are more than once pointed to the inkwell, which his son ʿAbd Allāh enjoys playing with, the pen, and the sheet(s) of paper, at which his son also peeks every now and then. On a few occasions, we find the letter writer in other places, such as before the ocean on the coast of Agadir, looking out at the waves while stretching out his hand to greet his friend Aḥmad al-Manjrah from afar. In his mind, he metamorphoses into a being with wings, gushes out into the open air, flying in the direction of his friend and re-transforming into himself before his eyes:

فليت لي أجنحة خفاقة. فاندلق في أجواز هذا الهواء الأفيح. فانقض على حضرتك
أيها الشريف. ثم أستحيل أمامك إلى مختارك الذي تعرفه. فأضم إلى الغالي والغازي
وأختيهما.[478]

> If only I had fluttering wings! So that I could take off into this sea-fragrant air,
> and then descend upon your presence, O noble one. Soon after, I would change
> into the Mukhtār that you know in front of your eyes and embrace al-Ghālī and
> al-Ghāzī and their two sisters.

At another point in the correspondence, we also learn that the letter writer is in
Essaouira (al-Suwayrah, alt. al-Ṣuwayrah) on the Atlantic coast, where he also –
although less elaborately in description – almost flies away with "the wings of
longing" (*ajniḥat al-ashwāq*) to his cousin Ibrāhīm ibn Aḥmad.[479]

The action of writing (and reading) a letter is evidently made part of the "plot"
not merely because of its spelling out in the letters, but also because of its evident
part in the context of narration – that is, the setting – and its portrayal. Given that
the writing is the progressive in-the-moment action of creating the letter itself, it
can provide glimpses into the "here-and-now" of the letter writer and his "current"
state.[480] The "present" of al-Sūsī the letter writer appears to be characterized at
times by instability and variability, and at other times by stagnation and
invariability.

In the Western tradition of diary fiction, the most prevalent male version of the
writer's setting is a room, in which the writer is commonly found seated at a
desk.[481] The inventory of the setting may be more or less detailed in its description
and more or less dynamic in its end (e.g. the writer being interrupted in some way
or dozing off while writing). This also ties into the letter's interpolated style of
narrating, which alternates between the "here-and-now" (the moment of writing)
and the event(s) being written about.[482] However, the four elements constituting
the setting (where the writer is, i.e. the context of the narration), the action (what

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[478] al-Sūsī (2015, pt. 3: 134). Dated "6 *rabīʿ al-thānī* 1361" (23 April 1942).The phrase
"al-Ghālī and al-Ghāzī and their two sisters" refers to the children of al-Manjrah.
[479] al-Sūsī (2015, pt. 2: 237). Dated "26 *rabīʿ al-thānī* 1363" (20 April 1944).
[480] See the outlines of the epistolary pact and the paradoxes of letters and correspondences that
deal with temporality and the "I/You, Here/There, Now/Then" dimension of letter writing in
"'Unnatural' Letters and the Epistolary Pact" (§ 5.1). See also Stanley, Salter, and Dampier
(2012: 278-279).
[481] Abbott (1985: 15-16).
[482] Again, see temporality and the "I/You, Here/There, Now/Then" dimension of letter writing
in § 5.1.

the writer does), the writer (what the writer is like), and the writing (how the writer writes), as outlined and presented by Abbott, have developed into key generic components of the Western diary genre and its "collection of [readers'] expectations."[483] A reading of Altman, when the author discusses the portrayal of the time of narration in Samuel Richardson's epistolary novels *Pamela* (1740) and *Clarissa* (1748), also prompts the question of whether letters – in the fictive or non-fictive genre – always are letters, or if they are sometimes more like personal diary entries.[484]

The letters of al-Sūsī are in many places reminiscent of dairy entries, especially the ones sent to his cousin Ibn Aḥmad and his friend al-Manjrah, although arguably a little less so in the letters sent to his former teacher Shaykh al-Ṭāhir ibn Muḥammad al-Īfrānī, given that the above four generic elements are not as textually tangible in these. Instead, the latter correspondence is, as demonstrated further below, to a larger degree colored by a more archaic epistolographic style that can be associated with the poetics of the pre-modern Arabic letter, such as elaborate and hyperbolic introductory addressations and occurrences of rhymed prose (*saj*ʿ).[485] We nonetheless find that the two former correspondences – that is, those with Ibn Aḥmad and al-Manjrah – do not necessarily join in on the diarist scheme, although one might not be able to state this with certainty in the case of Ibn Aḥmad, given that only one letter by him is transmitted in *al-Illighiyyāt*, while al-Sūsī's letters of response imply an additional three letters (at least).

However, Ibn Aḥmad's letter is clearly dialogical, that is, the discourse is evidently and more or less consistently directed to and engaging with an epistolary "You" (al-Sūsī), which is a part of the relational mode within the epistolary pact that safeguards the importance of the reader.[486] In contrast, al-Sūsī's letters are intermittently marked by a monological tone. Of course, a diary entry may not necessarily be formally monological, since it can also have an addressee or reader, imaginary or real, with whom it engages and to whom it directs its "speech," a feature corresponding to the reciprocity of the epistolary pact.[487] However, the monological tone of al-Sūsī creates a discourse that is deceptively self-directed, or self-centered, if one may: a self-directedness that is reminiscent of the diary and

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[483] Abbott (1985: 15).

[484] See Altman (1982: 124).

[485] Refer to the poetics of the pre-modern Arabic letter in "Pre-Modern Forms" (§ 3.1).

[486] See further on "relationality" (the "I-to-and-from-You" relational mode) and the "Writer/Reader" dimension in § 5.1.

[487] E.g. Abbott (1985: 11). Genette has already spoken of the letter, together with the journal, as a "quasi-interior monolog" (Genette, 1980: 218). See also "temporality" in § 5.1.

similar life narratives that does not include the response of a second party. Rhetorically, this directness to the self may accentuate the lack of reciprocity – or appear as an evident result thereof – that makes the letter writer to a larger extent give in to the monolog. With regard to the epistolary pact, this directness also explicitly or implicitly points toward unreciprocated expectations in terms of the levels of engagement from each correspondent.[488] It could also be an indication of the cathartic and psychotherapeutic function of letter writing for the individual, by which the need for, or expectation of, an equal or appropriate engagement that is usually associated with the epistolary pact is not necessarily the main motivator.[489]

One ought not to forget that the feeling of *ghurbah*, estrangement, was the catalyst for writing *al-Illighiyyāt*,[490] and hence why correspondences from this exilic time may have functioned as a psychological bridge between the letter writer, in his now alien hometown Illigh, and his peers and "brothers" in the larger cities. The letters of al-Sūsī are therefore "constructed as a tragedy of indirect communication,"[491] and, one may add, of psychological and physical barriers and alienation.[492] Thus, as a kind of psychotherapeutic device, the letter can simultaneously be "both the symptom of the neurosis and the instrument for its cure, but it lies halfway between neurosis and cure […]."[493] This is well illustrated with a passage depicting the internal reality of the letter writer's experiential world in one given moment in time – that is, the "there-and-then" – of being on the receiving end. Here, the letter is again made to be a part of the plot, but it may simultaneously also function as a kind of meta-commentary on letters and their psychological and physiological impacts, although here in a more positive light:

لم أبت اليلة ـ يشهد الله ـ بالفرح الهائل. فقد كنت أتلو الرسالة حيناً. وأرسل فكري حيناً، أستسيغ اللذة التي أحس بها في أعماق قلبي. فهل ما أجده إلاً فوق ما يجده الصيدان الضال في المهامة حين يقع على دليل مؤنس معه ماء عذب زلال. يكرع فيه بكل ما في مستطاعه؛ ولم أغف إلاً في السحر قليلاً. ثم انفتلت مع الفجر على

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[488] See "reciprocity" in the outline of the epistolary pact in § 5.1.
[489] For the cathartic and psychotherapeutic function of letters, see Altman (1982: 41-43).
[490] al-Sūsī (2015, pt. 1: 5-6).
[491] Altman (1982: 25). In the original, a description of the epistolary novel *Clarissa*.
[492] Cf. Altman (1982: 25-26). See also the polarity of "Bridge/Barrier" as distance breaking and distance making narrative measures in letter writing in the outline based on Altman in § 5.1.
[493] Altman (1982: 43).

عادتي؛ فعادت الحالة إلى هذا العشي. فإن لم تكن هذه هي الكهرباء التي تسري
بالكتابة على القراطيس من قلب إلى قلب؛ فلا أدري ما هي.[494]

> I did not sleep through that night – and God is my witness – due to my
> overwhelming joy. I would read [aloud] the letter a bit, and then I would let my
> mind wander for some time. I enjoyed the rapture that I felt in the innermost core
> of my heart. What is this thing that I am experiencing save being that which
> befalls the one who is lost and thirsty in the desert when he comes across a
> sympathetic guide that carries with him fresh cold water? Taking as many sips
> from it as possible. I did not doze off except a little in the time before dawn. Later,
> at daybreak, I left [for prayer?] as usual. Again this evening, this state [of rapture]
> came [upon me] yet again. If this is not that peculiar spark which comes into force
> through the writing on sheets of paper, from one heart to another, I do not know
> what it is.

It is noteworthy how, throughout the above passage, the presence of the epistolary
"You" is only implied by context. In this type of letter writing, we find a
consciousness that is "thrown back at its own resources,"[495] as Abbott puts it when
comparing letter writing with diary writing. We thus find that the issue is not
necessarily the absence or presence of an addressee per se, but instead a
suppression of the addressee's textual role and potential as a reader-writer to
actively inform the text.[496] In the case of al-Sūsī, the inability of the recipient to be
an active reader-writer may paradoxically have informed the letters' at times
cloistered sequences and strong writer-polarity, where al-Sūsī weighs heavily on
the writer-side of the "Writer/Reader" polarity, which signifies the ways in which
letter writers may alternate between these two roles or functions within one single
letter.[497]

By comparing these letters with the correspondence between al-Sūsī and
al-Manjrah we might be able to tell whether this is a sign of a deliberate
suppression of the second party or an "unfortunate" result of Ibn Aḥmad's lack of
dedication, or inability, to engage in the epistolary exchange with his cousin. We
find that al-Manjrah's letters, too, are dialogical and that al-Sūsī's letters to
al-Manjrah, in turn, although a bit more dialogical by the textual presence of an
epistolary "You"-character and their addressation, still contains some passages
characterized by a reflexivity that, as indicated above, not only renders a text

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[494] al-Sūsī (2015, pt. 2: 232).
[495] Abbott (1984: 11).
[496] Cf. Abbott (1984: 10-11).
[497] See the outline of polarities based on Altman in § 5.1.

self-conscious, or self-reflecting, but also, as argued by Abbott, exercises an influence on the writer and, one could add, the reader.[498] However, I would not describe the text's influence on its writer as a necessarily unconscious and innocent process, since, I believe, it could be objected that such a hermeneutics speaks rather of the affective mechanisms embedded in texts by their creators and the potential readers' later engagement of these.[499] However, this does not exclude the possibility of rhetorically ascribing or discarding from the text some kind of affective influence on its writer (and reader), and thereby creating such an illusion.

For al-Sūsī, it seems that it is the energy of the letter writer that becomes embedded in the text and is operationalized upon its engagement, as happens when al-Sūsī writes to Ibn Aḥmad about the peculiar spark that comes into being when writing on sheets of paper, from one heart to another, and about the rapture that befell him when reading his cousin's letter.[500] Of course, in terms of "influences" exerted on the writer of a text, one must also consider the kind of paradigmatic framework and generic conventions that would pertain to a certain genre that could inform the text in various ways (e.g. its register and its narrative voice).

In a monological fashion, where the discourse may have an audience (or a reader) or take place as if alone, al-Sūsī continues to describe his exemplary steadfastness in friendship. This is an aspect of his writing that also reflects the spirit and vigor of the letter writer that abounds within the text and informs it:

أشكر الله كثيراً على هذا القلب الذي بين جنبي. فإنه ألوف عشاق ليس بملال. مما يضرب به المثل في الوفاء بفضل الله. فإنه طوال هذه الغربة لا يزال في يقظتي ومنامي يصور لي كل إخواني واحداً واحداً. ثم لا يزيده تطاول العهد إلّا رقة إحساس. ولطف شعور. وتوقد التذكر؛ ومتى حام حوله ما ربما يكفكف عنانه. فإنه لا يلبث أن يندلق إلى جوه؛ فيسيح هائماً ملقياً وراء كلما يكفكفه.[501]

I thank God sincerely for the heart that is in my chest. For it is a devoted and loving heart that knows no fatigue and whose loyalty is spoken of in the proverb – praise be to God. Ever since this banishment, my heart in wakefulness and in sleep has painted for me my brothers, one by one. The long passage of time has only increased the heart's sensitivity and benevolence as well as the burning fire of remembrance. As soon as what one otherwise might have been able to curb [of

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[498] Cf. Abbott (1984: 38-39).
[499] See Nayed (1994: 122ff.). Cf. Abbott (1984: 39).
[500] al-Sūsī (2015, pt. 2: 232). See the translated segment immediately above.
[501] al-Sūsī (2015, pt. 2: 233).

longing] hovers over the heart, it spills out into the air. Aimlessly, the heart cruises away, leaving all that which it withheld behind.

7.1.2 Dialogs and the Illusion of Mimesis

Speech and the representation of speech is a recurring theme in al-Sūsī's correspondence with his cousin Ibn Aḥmad, and due to its literary and narratological arrangement and overall possible impact on the reading experience of the letters, it is arguably worthy some elaboration. For instance, we find poetry being presented as an intra-diegetic ("in the story world") element in the form of a recitation by one of the epistolary "characters," which, together with other occurrences of poetry, will be discussed more closely below.[502] Another example is the addressee's anticipated reading of the letter and the epistolary "I"'s own action of writing and reading letters being made into a part of the narrative.

As for dialogs, we find some remarkably long sequences of reported speech, or direct discourse, where the words are quoted verbatim as an imitated discourse.[503] While there is an assumption that this kind of speech representation is the most mimetic, that is, the most realistic one, or the one most faithful to reality,[504] such an assumption may often turn out to be erroneous, especially when dealing with fiction, where originality is illusory.[505] Even instances of direct discourse in non-fiction genres should arguably be scrutinized individually on the scale of mimesis, and, perhaps more importantly, with regard to other forms of relation than the mimetic one, such as affective ones.[506] Taking the argument even further, Genette states that:

> […] there is no imitation in narrative because narrative, like everything (or almost everything) in literature, is an act of language. […] Like every verbal act, a

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[502] Under the heading "Poetry as Speech Representation and a Part of the Epistolary Narrative" in the current chapter (§ 7.1.3).

[503] Genette (1980: 170, 172-173). I am using Genette's (1980: 169-185) terminology as a guide to describe different types of speech representation, which are divided into three formal categories (increasing in mimesis): 1) narratized speech (Fr. *discours narrativisé*) (e.g. The boy informed his mother of his wish to buy the cat); 2) transposed speech (Fr. *discours transposé*) (e.g. The boy told his mother that he really wanted that cat); 3) reported speech (Fr. *discours rapporté*) (e.g. "I really want that cat," the boy said to his mother).

[504] See e.g. Genette (1980: 169ff).

[505] Fludernik (1993: 409-414). See also McHale (2014).

[506] Wong (2019: 183).

narrative can only *inform* – that is, transmit meanings. Narrative does not "represent" a (real or fictive) story, it *recounts* it.[507]

This also applies to any verbal element in the story, such as dialogs and monologs, in the sense that the narrative reproduces or transcribes them.[508] Here, mimesis, at its extreme, can thus correspond to quotation, and perhaps even be replaced with the term *rhésis* (characters' discourse). In a Genettian spirit, one could therefore say that "[i]n a narrative there is only *rhésis* and *diegesis*,"[509] that is, the characters' discourse and the narrator's discourse.

When it comes to the verbal elements in an Arabic text, it can be quite tricky to differentiate between direct and indirect discourse due to the disparate ways (or lack thereof) of marking speech. In my reading of the Arabic text, I take the colon (:) as a marker of direct discourse in combination with direct address, as in the example: "*fa-qultu lahā: innanī ubarridu bi-hā ghullah […] a-wa lasti tadrīn […]*" ('Thus, I said to her: "With it, I am quenching a burning thirst […] Are you not aware […]?"').[510] And this, despite the appearance of the *inna* particle, which otherwise may also be interpreted as a marker of indirect discourse, as in the example: "*qultu lahā inna al-sūq qarīb*" ('I said to her that the market is nearby'). Another example of indirect speech (here, narratized speech) would be: "[…] *fataḥta ʿaynayka wa-ṣirta taḍḥaku ḍaḥkan kathīran. wa-tahzaʿu bi-man yaqūlūna annaka mayyit*" ('You opened your eyes and began to laugh profoundly. You scoffed at those who are saying that you are dead').[511] Therefore, the quotation marks in the English translations should be taken as an interpretation.

Moreover, the dialog cues are more consistent than the English translation may suggest; they are almost exclusively represented by the verb *qāla* ('he said'), as in 'he said,' 'she said,' and 'I said.' Furthermore, in a note on the literary conventions of Arabic dialog, the scholar Julia Bray writes that *qāla* almost invariably marks direct speech.[512] In her translation of al-Muḥassin ibn ʿAlī al-Tanūkhī's *al-Faraj baʿda al-shiddah* ('Deliverance Follows Adversity'), she also notes that the dialog cue used is always *qāla*, which seems to conform to traditional Arabic reading

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[507] Genette (1988: 42-43).
[508] Genette (1988: 43).
[509] Genette (1988: 43).
[510] Example from al-Sūsī (2015, pt. 2: 232).
[511] Example from al-Sūsī (2015, pt. 3: 115).
[512] It should be noted that Bray uses the term 'reported speech' for indirect speech. As mentioned above, I am using Genette's terminology as a guide, where the English term 'reported speech' (translation of Fr. *discours rapporté*) is used for direct speech. See Bray's introduction in al-Tanūkhī (2019: xxvii).

practice.[513] This could mean that dialogs found in texts, by convention, were "performed" – that is, read out loud, with or without the dialog cues.[514]

As is already known about Arabic epistolography, and as indicated in the letter writing of al-Sūsī himself,[515] it is feasible that both non-dialog and dialog were read aloud – even if this only happens as a diegetic element, meaning that it may be a literary figure rather than something that actually took place in reality. However, the reader might find little reason to doubt al-Sūsī when he tells his cousin Ibn Aḥmad that he had spent the whole day re-reading his letter out of joy.[516] In this case, it is noteworthy that the verb used is not *qaraʾa*, that is usually – in a modern context, at least – understood as the verb for 'to read' [lit. 'he read'], but rather the verb *talā* ('he read out loud; he recited [s.th.]'),[517] as in the example cited below (p. 149), in which al-Sūsī writes to his cousin: "I have spent the whole day in a ceaseless recitation of your letter."[518] With that being said, we cannot be entirely sure that the word *talā* is used in its actual sense of "recitation" or "reading out loud," as in contrast to *qaraʾa* in the sense of "reading."

The use of the word *talā* rather than *qaraʾa* may be a mere reflection of the author's traditional education, as a result of which the word *talā* could correspond to both of these meanings. Thus, what is of primary interest here might not be the actual meaning of the word itself, but instead the author's choice to use it. Given the associations of the word *talā* with the reading (or the recitation) of the Quran, a modern Arabic writer may use the word to underline the educational or religious background of the one doing the reading.

One finds that the Egyptian author Najīb Maḥfūẓ (d. 2006) used the verb *talā* in this way in an episode in *Qaṣr al-shawq* ('Palace of Desire') (1957). In this episode, the father of Kamāl, Aḥmad ʿAbd al-Jawād, reads an essay, which to him is heretical, written by his son. Here, Maḥfūẓ uses the word to reinforce the idea of the father's religious background and it is accompanied by other cues which give this idea further support (the manner of preparation and sitting), which makes the episode worth quoting in its entirety. Maḥfūẓ uses the words *talā* and *qaraʾa* interchangeably for "reading aloud." If the object of the father's reading was not specified, one might have thought that he was about to read the Quran, not an essay found in a journal:

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[513] al-Tanūkhī (2019: xxvii).
[514] al-Tanūkhī (2019: xxvii).
[515] al-Sūsī (2015, pt. 2: 232). Discussed further below.
[516] al-Sūsī (2015, pt. 2: 232).
[517] Refer to Wehr (1979: keyword: "talā; tilāwa").
[518] al-Sūsī (2015, pt. 2: 232). The verb *talā* is used a second time in the next paragraph.

وعند ضحى اليوم، وعند فراغه من الصلاة والإفطار، تربع على الكنبة وفتح المجلة
باهتمام وراح يقرأ بصوت مرتفع ليمتلئ بمعانيها، لكن ماذا وجد فيها؟ إنه يقرأ
المقالات السياسية فيفهمها دون عناء، أما هذه المقالة فإنها دارت برأسه
وأفزعت قلبه، وأعاد تلاوتها بعناية فطالع كلاما عن عالم يدعى ((دارون))
ومجهوده في جزر نائية، ومقارنات ثقيلة بين شتى الحيوانات حتى وقف مبهوتا عند
تقرير غريب يزعم أن الإنسان سلالة حيوانية! بل أنه متطور عن نوع من القردة!
وكرر تلاوة الفقرة الخطيرة منزعجا، ثم لبث ذاهلا أمام هذه الحقيقة الأسيفة وهي
أن ابنا من صلبه يقرر ـ دون اعتراضه أو مناقشة ـ أن الإنسان سلالة حيوانية.[519]

> At forenoon that day, after prayers and breakfast, he [Aḥmad ʿAbd al-Jawād] *sat down with his legs crossed in the sofa and opened the journal with interest*. *He began to read it aloud [rāḥa **yaqraʾu bi-ṣawt murtafiʿ**] to get the sense of it* [Kamāl's essay]. But what did he find? *He could read [**yaqraʾ**] political articles and understand them without difficulty. But this essay made his head turn and agitated his heart. *He read it aloud again [aʿāda **tilāwatahā**]* carefully. He came across a reference to a scientist named Darwin and his work on some distant islands. This man had made tedious comparisons between various different animals until he was astonished to reach the strange conclusion that argued that man was descended from animals; in fact, that he had evolved from a kind of ape. Al-Sayyid Ahmad *read the offensive paragraph yet another time* [karrara **tilāwat al-faqrah al-khaṭīrah**] with increasing alarm. He was stunned by the sad reality that his son, his own flesh and blood, was asserting, without objection or discussion, that man was descended from animals.[520]

In the case of al-Sūsī, there might not be such an overt intention to accentuate his own religious or educational background, but the use of the word is, perhaps, a byproduct of it instead. The ambiguity surrounding the usage of the term *talā*, instead of *qaraʾa*, might be solved by looking at the context, which makes it clear that al-Sūsī's repeated reading of Ibn Aḥmad's letter caught the attention of his wife, Umm ʿAbd Allāh (see below p. 149). It is therefore feasible to believe that Umm ʿAbd Allāh overheard her husband reading the letter, unless, of course, one imagines that she walked past him throughout the day and noticed him silently reading something. There is also the possibility that al-Sūsī's choice of word (*talā*)

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[519] Maḥfūẓ (2013: 429).

[520] English translation from the Everyman's Library edition (Mahfouz [2001: 889]), with slight modifications. I deemed some modifications necessary in order to highlight the particular mannerisms of the character Aḥmad ʿAbd al-Jawād, which were somewhat lost in the English translation available. Emphasis (italics and bold) by me.

accentuates the value and spiritual qualities of the text he is reading – which are further discussed below – and the ceremonial aspect of reading a letter.

There are three episodes in the correspondence between al-Sūsī and Ibn Aḥmad that perfectly illustrate the usage of a deliberately stylized direct discourse. Naturally, therefore, the faithfulness of the quotations – if we accept them as such – to actual uttered utterances in reality is highly suspect and improbable. This is not to say that the general message and sense of the dialogs are necessarily made up, nor that they never took place, but that their language and locution as found in the letters most probably do not correspond to reality.

The stylization of speech is achieved through a standardized and classical form of Arabic, [*al-lughah al-ʿarabiyyah*] *al-fuṣḥá*, which is used to translate a presumably vernacular or mixed variety (vernacular and standardized) of Arabic and/or French. In the case of a conversation between al-Sūsī and his wife (see below p. 149), it may not have been Arabic that was spoken at all, but rather Amazigh. It is not only the stylized language of the dialogs that is noticeable to the critical eye, but also the length and details of the conversations reproduced. As argued by Camilla Asplund Ingemark in her study on four historical legends of the Finnish war, and as understood from the terminology of Genette, extensive or frequent usages of direct discourse – that is, verbatim transcriptions or quotes of speech – may serve to reduce the narrator's emotional distance from the event(s) narrated.[521]

At the end of the year 1937, al-Sūsī relates[522] to Ibn Aḥmad a meeting with an inspector (*murāqib*) from Tafraout (Tāfrāwut),[523] who, at the request of the Resident-general (*al-muqīm*) Charles Noguès (d. 1971),[524] had come to interrogate him about his doings. Here, as with other examples, the concept of distance[525] as the emotional proximity of the narrator to the events being narrated may also allow us to explore narratives not only as stories of events, but also, and perhaps more compellingly so in the case of life writing, as experiences.[526] The narrative distance, in the sense of the narrative of words, thus tells the story of a man and a

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[521] Ingemark (2016: 316). Cf. the notion of narrative distance in Genette (1983: 171-173).

[522] This letter is undated but was probably written in November or December of 1937. See al-Sūsī (2015, pt. 2: 220-222).

[523] A town in the Tiznit (Tiznīt) province in the Souss-Massa region.

[524] Charles Noguès was the French Resident-general in Morocco from 13 September 1936 to 21 June 1943.

[525] See "Narratological and Stylistic Inquiries" (§ 5.2).

[526] Ingemark (2016: 308).

propagator of knowledge unjustly put into exile due to alleged activities deemed counter to the governmental, or colonial, interests.

Thus, as argued by James Phelan, the scene of dialog not only constitutes an event in the story [world], but also a mediated telling that is "an integral part of the ethical dimension of the passage."[527] Such a notion of mediated telling does indeed challenge the long-established distinction between story and discourse and opens up to exploration the question of how dialog may inform the diegesis and function as a narrative element:[528]

> فكان مما قلت له: إنني لا أقوم إلا ببث العلم؛ ولا أشتغل بما سوى ذلك؛ فقال لي: أتعرف علالاً؟ فقلت له نعم: إنه كان قريني في الدراسة؛ كما كان غيره من العلماء المنبثين في (المغرب) فبيني وبين الجميع معرفة. فمنهم أساتذتي ومنهم قرنائي. وأنا لست بنكرة في (المغرب) لما لعائلتي أولاً؛ ولما لي ثانياً؛ فقال: أهذا إذن هو سبب هذه الصيحات الصارخة من الجرائد الوطنية. فتجاهلت فقلت له: كيف؟ فقال: أن هناك صرخات حولك؛ فقلت له: وماذا يقال عني؛ فهل أشتغل بغير ما أقول لكم؛ وهل هناك من الوطنيين أو غيرهم من صرح بأنني أشتغل بغير ما أقول؟ فكان الجواب؛ أن الباشا لا يمكن أن ينفيك لو لم تصنع شيئاً. ثم ضحك المراقب. وقال: أو أنك لا تعطي للباشا الدراهم؛ فقلت له: حتى الباشا لم أسمع عنه قبل عني إلا خيراً. وكل ما هنالك أنني أرسل يوماً إلي فنفيت بغتة. ثم دارت الأحاديث مع تبسمات؛ فكأن الجلسة ليست برسمية؛ ثم قال لي: أن الكولونيل يطلب منك أن تقيد له في رق ما كنت ذكرته له في (إيغرم) فذهبت إلى مكتب[529].

I said to him, i.a.: "I do not do anything other than spreading knowledge, and I do not work for anything other than that." Upon which the inspector asked me: "Do you know ʿAllāl?" "Yes, he was a peer of mine during my studies, just like several other scholars around Morocco. I am acquainted with everyone. Some were my teachers, and others were my peers. Moreover, I am not unknown in Morocco, firstly for what is due to my family, and then, myself," I answered him. "So this is the reason behind all those loud cries from the nationalist papers?" he then asked. I pretended to know nothing about it and asked: "What do you mean?" "That there is a real buzz about you," he said. "What is said about me?" I then asked, "Am I occupying myself with anything other than what I have told you?

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[527] Phelan (2017: 19).
[528] Wong (2019: 194).
[529] al-Sūsī (2015, pt. 2: 220).

> And is there anyone from the nationalists, or others, that has claimed that I am?" His answer was that "the Pasha cannot exile you if you have not done anything wrong." The inspector then laughed and said: "Either that or you are not giving the Pasha any dirhams" "Even from the Pasha, I have not heard anything but good things about me," I said to him. "All there is to it is that, one day, I was sent for, and then, suddenly sent into exile." The conversation then continued lightheartedly as if it had not been an official hearing. He eventually told me that "the colonel asks you to write down for him on a paper that which you mentioned to him in Irherm." Thus, I went to an office.

In the same letter, the above dialogical episode is soon followed by another one of similar length and stylization,[530] in which al-Sūsī meets the colonel from Taroudant, who interrogates him about his doings at the request of the government. This colonel, like the inspector from Tafraout, seems somewhat sympathetic to al-Sūsī.[531] The colonel reassures him that he had no part in al-Sūsī's exile: "I did not do anything. It was the Pasha [al-Tihāmī al-Glāwī[532]] and the Minister [Muḥammad al-Muqrī?[533]] – it was those two alone who did it" (*anā lam artakib shay'. fa-al-bāshā wa-al-wazīr faqaṭ humā alladhāni faʿalā hādhā*).[534]

Again, the wordiness of the dialog in the original Arabic is far from any spoken language, whether Arabic or French. We are instead dealing with a literary language that would have seemed unnatural, as a dialog, in a real life situation. Essentially, it does not matter much what the original language was, since the point is that a stylized language that would not normally be used in a real life dialog characterizes the text.

In a later letter from al-Sūsī, dated "1360-2 *[ṣafar]*-8" (7 March 1941),[535] which was seemingly written in an euphoric state upon finally receiving a letter of response after a three-year-long period of perceived neglect, we find a dialog between him and his wife, Umm ʿAbd Allāh, that is highly stylized not only by variety, but also by rhetorical devices. The dialog appears at the beginning of the

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[530] al-Sūsī (2015, pt. 2: 221).

[531] It is not clear whether the inspector and the colonel were Moroccan natives or not.

[532] al-Tihāmī al-Glāwī (d. 1375/1956) was the Pasha of Marrakesh from 1912 up until the year of his death in 1956. He was an ally of the French colonial power and led a conspiracy that eventually overthrew the Sultan Muḥammad V (r. 1955-1957). For more on al-Tihāmī al-Glāwī, see Bearman et al. (2012: keyword: "Glāwā").

[533] Here, "the Minister" (Ar. *al-wazīr*) could refer to the Grand Vizier Muḥammad al-Muqrī (d. 1377/1957), who intermittently held his post from 1917 to 1955 and acted as a mediator between the Sultan and the French Resident-general. For more on Muḥammad al-Muqrī, see Lentz (1994, keyword: "Muhammad El-Muqri": 560).

[534] al-Sūsī (2015, pt. 2: 221).

[535] al-Sūsī (2015, pt. 2: 231-236).

letter, in which the letter writer narrates, through prose and poetry, his regained hope and faith regarding the friendship with his cousin and his joyous and almost frenzied rereading of his letter.

ظللت النهار كله أتلو رسالتك مرة بعد مرة. حتى تنبهت إلي ربة الدار فقالت: أتريد أن تحفظ هذه الرسالة التي تعيدها هكذا منذ الصباح إلى هذا المساء. فقلت لها: إنني أبرد بها غلة كانت تتلظى منذ ثلاث سنوات؛ فما أعيد قراءتها إلا وأحس بالبرودة تتمشى في كبدي تمشي النهار في حواشي الليل بعد انبثاق الفجر؛ أولست تدرين أنها لإبراهيم بن أحمد خير من كان صاحباً وفياً. وخليلاً مصافياً، وقريناً معاوناً. وألفاً كانت حياتي مع حياته في أحقاب كالماء والراح بعد شعشعة الكؤوس.[536]

> I have spent the whole day in a ceaseless recitation of your letter, until I caught the attention of the lady of the house, whereupon she said: "Are you trying to memorize that letter which you have been rereading in that way since the morning until now in the evening?" Thus, I said to her: "With it, I am quenching a burning thirst that has lasted for three years. I do not read it again without feeling a coolness move through my chest, just like the day when it wanders at the brink of the night when dawn breaks through. Are you not aware that this letter is from Ibrāhīm ibn Aḥmad, our most faithful, sincere bosom friend, and helpful companion? Our confidant, with whom for a long time I have spent my life, like the water and the wine when mixed and diluted by the [circulating] cups."

The dialog is infused with pictorial elements, meaning that it has a clear visual dimension that makes "the contents vivid and stark."[537] The most eye-catching imagery may be that which is created by the simile. Perhaps, in a way, to emphasize the comparison, the confirmed simile (*tashbīh muʾakkad*) of "*uḥissu bi-al-burūdah tatamashshā fī kabidī tamashshī al-nahār fī ḥawāshī al-layl [...]*" ([…] feeling a coolness move through my chest just like the day when it wanders at the brink of the night […]) quite romantically depicts the therapeutic effect of the letter on the mind and body of its reader. This kind of confirming simile is achieved through the elision of the simile element (*adāt al-tashbīh*),[538] replacing it with the noun (*tamashshī*) that goes with the verb (*tamashshā*).[539]

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[536] al-Sūsī (2015, pt. 2: 232).

[537] Chowdhury (2015: 134).

[538] For example, in Arabic, *k-*, *ka-mithl*, *ka-anna*, which corresponds to 'like,' 'just as,' and 'as [though]' in English.

[539] In Arabic grammar, this kind of verbal noun is known as *al-mafʿūl al-muṭlaq* ('the absolute object'). However, rhetorically, the function or effect of the construction remains that of emphasis and adding force to the verb. See Wright (2005, vol. 2, part 3: 54-55, d).

Moreover, the word used to designate the chest is *kabid*, literally 'liver,' a word that ought to be understood not in its literal sense, but within its classical Arabic sense, that has survived until this day. *Kabid* could also denote that which lies in proximity to the liver, such as the chest and the belly, or the center or interior of something.[540] While certainly not being alone in doing so, Semitic traditions ascribed a psychophysiology to the liver, together with other organs, like the heart.[541] The liver was thought of as the center, or one amongst other props, of feelings and emotions, that is, as the place where psychological experiences take place.[542]

Thus, al-Sūsī, in the role of the reader-writer, as well as speaker, seemingly effortlessly and readily gives an accentuated albeit popular account of the solace gained from the re-established relationship with his cousin, as evidenced by his receipt of the letter.

One also finds what seems to be an example of the detailed simile (*tashbīh mufaṣṣal*), in which the simile feature (*wajh al-tashbīh*) – that is, the characteristic or property possessed – is explicitly mentioned (*fī al-aḥqāb*, '[for] a long time').[543] This is in the last line of the quote: "*wa-ilf kānat ḥayātī maʿa ḥayātihi **fī al-aḥqāb** ka-māʾ wa-al-rāḥ baʿda shaʿshaʿat al-kuʾūs*" ('Our confident, with whom for a long time I have spent my life like the water and the wine when mixed and diluted by the [circulating] cups'). Here, the dialog is quite obviously given an aesthetic and emotional appeal that almost makes it dramatic. The Bacchic inspired image of wine and water, mixed and diluted by the circulating cups, is used to define the deep-rooted relationship between al-Sūsī and his cousin Ibn Aḥmad. This allusion to classical wine poetry (*khamriyyāt*[544]) functions as yet another literary move that results in a highly stylized, and "unnatural," language.

Given that our letter writer is a religious scholar, one might find it peculiar that he would use such an image to describe his relationship with his cousin. A predecessor to al-Sūsī, the Egyptian writer and *nahḍah* intellectual Rifāʿah Rāfiʿ al-Ṭahṭāwī (d. 1290/1873), who was also confessionally schooled and an Imam, similarly made references to Bacchic poetry in his travelogue *Takhlīṣ al-ibrīz ilá*

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[540] Bearman et al. (2012: keyword: "kabid").

[541] For a brief account of these traditions, see Bearman et al. (2012: keyword: "kabid").

[542] Bearman et al. (2012: keyword: "kabid").

[543] Chowdhury (2015: 126).

[544] A modern critical term used to designate Bacchic or wine poetry. In pre-modern terminology this kind of poetry seems to have usually been referred to through expressions such as "*al-qawl fī al-khamr*" ('sayings about wine') and "*waṣṣāf lil-khamr*" ('depicter of wine'). See Bearman et al. (2012: keyword: "khamriyya").

talkhīṣ Bārīz ('The Extrication of Gold towards the Summation of Paris'[545]) (1834). Citing the poetry of al-Buḥturī (d. 248/897), al-Ṭahṭāwī evokes a quite similar image of the wine and water that becomes mixed and diluted by the circulating cups:

<div dir="rtl">

هل العيش إلا ماء كرم مصفق   ترقرقه في الكأس ماء غمام

وعود بنان حين ساعد شدوه   على نغم الأوتار ناي زنام[546]

</div>

> *Is life anything else but watered-down wine,*
>
> *sparkling in the glass with water from the clouds*
>
> *And an oud (lute) resounding with a pleasing tune under the arm of Bunān,*
>
> *whilst assisted in its chant by the dulcet tones of Zunām's flute?*[547]

Again, while this might seem like a curious image to be evoked in the writings of a religious scholar, it indicates the importance of recycling and appropriating literary imagery not only in pre-modern writings, but also in modern writings from the 19th and 20th centuries.

7.1.3 Poetry as Speech Representation and a Part of the Epistolary Narrative

From the late Umayyad period and onwards (132/750-), a new kind of artistic prose – diversely termed *kitābat al-inshāʾ* (loosely, 'chancery style') or *al-nathr al-fannī* ('artistic prose')[548] – developed through the chanceries, in which insertions of verse – typically without any authorial attribution – became a conscious principle within the compositional enterprise. As Meisami and Starkey propose, this renovated artistic prose can be described as a "poeticized prose" that is characterized by:

> rhyme and assonance, parallelism, balanced phrases and division into proportional sections (*fuṣūl* [sg. *faṣl*]), richness of description, the use of metaphor and of rhetorical figures (**badīʿ**) hitherto largely reserved for poetry,

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[545] Title translation from Johnston (2013: 1).

[546] al-Ṭahṭāwī (2012: 137).

[547] The English translation is based on Farmer (1928: 158) (the two last lines) and Newman (2012: n.a.) (the two first lines), with slight alterations.

[548] For these terms and their English translations, see Meisami and Starkey (1998: keyword: "artistic prose"). Cf. Bearman et al. (2012: keyword: "inshāʾ").

and the use for both structural and thematic purposes, quotations in verse and prose (proverbs, Koranic verses, Prophetic sayings) […][549]

Thus, this tradition created a kind of "mixed style" in which there was a close relationship between narrative, discursive passages, and inserted interpolations.[550] The above stylistic features of this artistic prose were also found to have been adopted in non-Arabic works, such as in Hebrew, Urdu, Persian, and Turkish prose writing, and they moreover continued to be employed by prose writers up until approximately the first half of the 20th century.[551] However, one does find even later writers utilizing this kind of artistic prose, such as the Egyptian author Jamāl al-Ghīṭānī (d. 2015) in his pseudo-historical novel *Zaynī al-Barakāt*[552] (1974), but in this case as a kind of pastiche.

In earlier Umayyad (r. 661-750) Arabic prose, the incorporation of passages of verse was mostly contextual, meaning that the inclusion of verse in a predominantly prose text often served an illustrative or evidentiary[553] purpose for the main text, as in the case with, for example, works of *tārīkh* (history) and later works of *adab* (prose genres) that emerged in the 9th century.[554] The phenomenon of prosimetrum, combining or alternating prose and poetry in a literary composition, is thus found extensively in pre-modern Arabic literature, regardless of its function or artistic purpose.

In addition to prose genres of the *adab* category, such as treatises/epistles (*risālah*, pl. *rasāʾil*), *akhbār* (sg. *khabar*, 'anecdote'), and historical narratives, such as *ayyām al-ʿarab*-writings ('battle-days of the Arabs [in pre- and early Islamic eras'), the alternation between prose and poetry also occurs in the *sīrah* literature, the popular epic or chivalric romances where "characters speak and emote in lengthy passages of verse," which are sometimes referred to as "song cycles."[555]

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[549] Meisami and Starkey (1998: keyword: "artistic prose": 106). Bold in original.

[550] Meisami and Starkey (1998: keyword: "artistic prose": 106).

[551] Meisami and Starkey (1998: keyword "artistic prose": 106) and Bearman et al. (2012: keyword: "inshāʾ").

[552] Translated into English as *Zayni Barakat* by Farouk Abdel Wahab (al-Ghitani [1988]).

[553] Within Arabic literary history, poetry was generally regarded as more authoritative than prose, perhaps due to its more rigid structural elements (e.g. mono-end rhyme, frequent medial caesura, and quantitative meter) that meant poetry was deemed less bound to change during transmission within an oral context. The evidentiary function of poetry is thus provided by its assigned role as a "witness" (Ar. *shāhid*), in the sense of it being evidence in a particular matter (Reynolds [1997: 278]).

[554] Meisami and Starkey (1998: 106) and Heinrichs (1997: 261-262). Cf. Hammond (2018: keyword: "prosimetrum").

[555] Hammond (2018: keyword: "prosimetrum"; "sīra").

With regard to the intermingling of prose and poetry, it has been stated that a "complete separation of poetry and prose was effected by the late 1920s and 1930s, bringing about a new literary aesthetic in which prose and poetry did not mix."[556] If, by this, one means that prose and poetry ceased to interact and be juxtaposed, as we have seen in earlier literary productions, we might discover that this is not necessarily true when looking into the letter texts of the present study.[557] These show that there are indeed modern writers of Arabic literature from the 1920s and onwards up until at least the mid-1940s who did continue this earlier aesthetic of pre-modern prosimetric genres.

Poetry appears in all three correspondences that have been sampled from *al-Illighiyyāt* for this study. Out of these three, the correspondence between al-Sūsī and his former teacher Shaykh al-Ṭāhir ibn Muḥammad al-Īfrānī contains a quite significantly larger amount of verse than the other two correspondences. The occurrence of poetry is higher in frequency and lengthier in some places, and in some instances, only poetry is transmitted (i.e. letter-poems), or poetry with very little accompanying prose.

The question of whether the insertions of poetry into the letters function as thematic or contextual illustrators, or whether they also have a narrative function, needs some thought. Here, narrative function is understood as a [textual] element's ability to "enter into correlation with other elements" within a particular work and with the work as a whole, whereby the element in question can also be recognized as carrying some significance in the train of events (the story).[558] Indeed, lines of poetry seem to be used in the thematic sense too, where their purpose is to illustrate or support an idea or expand on a topic, such as when Ibn Aḥmad regretfully explains his loyalty and fraternal love to al-Sūsī after a period of about three years of silence. The cousin contends that fate (*al-dahr*, '[the fate of] time') sometimes works against man and uses a line of original poetry (*ṭawīl*/-*iyā*) to expand on the theme:

طالما حاولت أن أبث لكم ما في سويداء قلبي من صداقة متينة. وحب خالص الإخاء

المتزايد الذي لا تزيده الأيام إلا رسوخاً. والعواصف إلا ثباتاً وكيف لا. ونحن من

أبنائكم البررة. فهل تخالوننا نتخبط في عقوقكم. جاهلين أن: لنفثات الأقلام ما لا يجهل

---

[556] Reynolds (1997: 280). Even Reynolds mentions three exceptions: the Arabic folk epic (*sīrah*), oral historical narratives, and the *maqāmah*. See Reynolds (1997: 285).

[557] Neither in those from *al-Illighiyyāt* nor *Rasāʾil al-Shābbī*.

[558] This definition of narrative function rests on the formalist definitions given by Tzvetan Todorov (1966: 125) and Vladimir Propp (1968 [1928]: 21).

قدره أديب. وأنها تجعل ما كان بين القلوب قوي الأركان. ثابت الأساس؛ وتعبر عما

في الضمائر. وما تكنه حول من لها حاولت وحاولت؛ ولكن أنى ذلك؛ والدهر ذو

غلظة حيناً وذو لين:

هو الدهر يأبى أن أنال مراميا ويبغي اعتسافاً أن يشد وثاقيا[559]

How often have I not tried to convey from the depths of my heart my unfailing friendship and my sincere and ever-growing brotherly love to you, which is only increasingly strengthened by the passing of time and the befalling of turbulences. How could this not be, when we are one of your devoted heirs? Do you then think that we walk blindly in disobedience to you, unaware of that which can be found in literary works, the value of which every litterateur worthy of the name ought to comprehend? Literary works surely provide firm ground and strong support for that which exists between hearts and communicate what the innermost conceals about those around it. I have tried, again and again [, to reach out through writing]. But how could I possibly have done that when we know that fate [al-dahr], at times, can be cruel and, at others, lenient and sparing?

It is fate [al-dahr] that denies me my goals

and forcefully wants to chain me down

The theme of time (*al-dahr*) – here in the sense of fate and inevitability – and the bending to its course is a recurring theme throughout the sampled correspondences from both *al-Illighiyyāt* and *Rasāʾil al-Shābbī*. We find that in its stylistic and narrative elaboration it is often depicted as some kind of agent, through *tashkhīṣ* (personification), whereby this abstract entity achieves a villain-like character function that works against the wishes and desires of the epistolary "I"s.

While the concept of time, *al-dahr* (also *al-zamān* or *al-ayyām* [lit. 'the days']), as the causer, or the source, of both the good and bad things that may befall people during their lifetime is found in pre-Islamic poetry, later poets and writers of the Islamic period did continue to use *al-dahr* in this sense, which carries strong connotations of fate.[560]

In our letter texts we are more or less exclusively dealing with the censure of time (*dhamm al-dahr* or *dhamm al-zamān*), which, again, is a poetical theme that goes back as far as pre-Islamic times, and in which the letter writer ascribes his

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[559] al-Sūsī (2015, pt. 2: 230). Bold in original. The letter in question is dated "1359 - 12 [*dhū al-ḥijjah*] - 18" (*ca.* 17 January 1941).

[560] See Lane (1864: keyword: "d-h-r"), Cohen-Mor (2001: 47), and Bearman et al. (2012: keyword: "dahr").

misfortunes and hardships to time.[561] However, the letter writer oscillates between the conception of time (*al-dahr*) and the divine decree (*al-qadar*) when rationalizing unfolded events and coping with them.[562] Interestingly, though, we find that al-Sūsī also depicts *al-qadar* in prose in a similar manner to that of *al-dahr*, whereby *al-qadar* is also given an agentic character function:

<div dir="rtl">

لندع القدر يفعل بنا ما أراد. ولنعض بالأسنان على الازدياد في الكروع من المعارف؛
فذلك هو الذي يبقى؛ وهو الذي يقدمه كل واحد منا غداً لأمته ولأصحابه يوم يتوب
الدهر. فيجتمع الشمل ثانياً.[563]

</div>

> Let us leave fate [*al-qadar*] to do what it wishes with us. Let us stick doggedly to sipping knowledge. For that is all that will remain and that is what every single one of us will present to his community and comrades tomorrow – when time [*al-dahr*] will repent. Then, there will be reunion.

In addition to the above, one can also find interesting places where poetry seems to behave as a narrative element. The lengthiest poem found in the three correspondences was composed by al-Sūsī and presented by him to al-Īfrānī in July 1942 (Rajab 1361AH) upon the Shaykh's visit to Illigh.[564] This poem of 67 *bayt* (verses) is laudatory in essence and it opens up modestly with an apology for its unworthiness and its inability to repay the favor of al-Īfrānī's visit.

This lengthy letter-poem is at once a structure of address in the form of a recitation or reading (aloud) and, as we shall see, a structure of an interpersonal relationship based on mutual commitment and indebtedness. We find the arrival of al-Īfrānī being narrated with almost epic imagery (*bayt* 8-19, *kāmil/-āʾā*):

<div dir="rtl">

خاض الهواجر شهر ناجر الذي   فيه النهار كما تشب صلاء

ذاب الدماغ من الضباب وأنه   لمصابر جمر الغضا اللظاء

ومعرض حر الجبين للافح   في القيظ يصهر صخرة صماء

</div>

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[561] Cf. Cohen-Mor (2001: 47).

[562] For the Islamic concept of *al-qadar*, see Bearman et al. (2012: keyword: "al-ḳaḍāʾ wa 'l-ḳadar").

[563] al-Sūsī (2015, pt. 2: 235). Dated "1360 -2 [*ṣafar*] - 8" (7 March 1941).

[564] The poem is found in al-Sūsī (2015, pt. 3: 38-42).

ترك الظلال الوارفات بـ(يفرن)   وجداولاً خرارة زرقاء

والغلب من الفاف زيتون متى   آذنت لريح صبا تصد ذكاء

وحدائق النبت العميم ترف أز   هاراً فتغمر بالشذى الأرجاء

فأتى تغذ به الركائب في سمو   م سجرت لفحاته الفيفاء

وعلى جوانبه وقد ركب التنو   فة ملهباً بسياطه الوجناء

كسماوة مسموكة من عثير   قد ثار حتى ناطح الجوزاء

والآل يوهم من بعيد طرف مل   هوف الجوانح كونه دأماء

فيكاد يهوى كارعاً في ماء سل   سال نمير لو يصادف ماء

ماذا يحق لمن يشرف هكذا   أبناءه ويعانق الرمضاء

متجشماً ثبج الهواجر خائضاً   بحر السراب بسملق بيداء[565]

He pierced the midday heat during the month of Nājir,[566]

in which the day is like that of a blazing fire.

The mind melts from its smog – Indeed,

he is bearing stoutly the embers of ghaḍā[567]

The forehead is truly gleaming in the oppressive heat –

A heat that melts even a heavy rock.

He left the lingering shadows in Ifrane,

blue, purling streamlets,

---

[565] al-Sūsī (2015, pt. 3: 39-40).

[566] According to *Lisān al-ʿarab* (1955: keyword: "n-j-r"), Nājir is the pre-Islamic name for Ṣafar, the second month in the Islamic calendar.

[567] A variety of euphorbia (spurge). Refer to Wehr (1979: keyword: "ghaḍw").

the fields of densely growing olive trees,

when putting forth their leaves for the east wind, providing shade from the sun,

and the wide gardens that flutter with flowers

and overflow with an abundant fragrance.

The mounts came running with him through the sandstorm

whose fire has ignited the whole of the desert.

He traversed the desert

stirring up his mount with his lashes.

Like a sky thickened by dust

that had risen until it rammed Jawzāʾ.[568]

From afar, the mirage deceives the eye of the grievous

for being an ocean

Thus, he almost plunges down, putting his mouth into the fresh cool water,

but if only he had found water!

What is due to the one who in this way

honors his children and embraces the scorching heat?

The one who endures the heights of the midday heat

and dives into the ocean mirage in the wastelands.

These lines undeniably bring to mind the traditional *raḥīl* (travel) section that customarily follows the romantic or elegiac (*aṭlāl-*)*nasīb* that opens the classical (or classicist) Arabic *qaṣīdah* that is conventionally – though mistakenly – thought of as tripartite ([*aṭlāl-*]*nasīb-raḥīl*-main theme [e.g. *madīḥ* 'praise; panegyric]).[569]

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[568] The constellation of Gemini, or that of Orion. Refer to Lane (1864: keyword: "j-w-z").

[569] Sperl (1978: 31-32, 36). The [*bukāʾ ʿalá*] *aṭlāl* section (the 'weeping-at-the-ruins' section) refers to the initiatory lamenting at the desolate ruins of a beloved's campsite. The 3rd/9th century literary critic and religious scholar Ibn Qutaybah (d. 276/889), who presented a formal outline of the tripartite *qaṣīdah*, refers to the *aṭlāl* as *dhikr al-diyār* ('the remembrance or mention of the campsite') (see Sperl [1978: 1-2, 36]). It should be noted that the tripartite structure could be regarded as an idealized scheme – probably from the

In its narrative, it follows the heroic model of a pre-Islamic poetic paradigm, which is, as explained by Andras Hamori, "produced by the will to be caught up in all encounters, joyful and lethal alike."[570] In the terminology of Hamori, the heroic model is distinguished by a dualism of two divergent principles: kenosis, in the sense of 'emptying,' and plerosis, in the sense of 'filling,'[571] if one may use two non-indigenous terms to "rationalize" this principal dualism.

Thus, the *raḥīl* seems to express the core aspect of the classical heroic model,[572] although, in our poem, it is not part of the poet's usual self-praise (*mufākharah* or *fakhr*),[573] where he is the protagonist, but, instead, the poet's praise of another man. Here, the kenosis is exemplified by the hero character – that is, al-Īfrānī, not the poet himself – generously leaving "the campsite," and the bravery and even desperation – if not carelessness – with which he faces the dangers and hardships of the desert journey (the scorching heat, the fiery sandstorm, and the deceptive mirage).[574] However, in our case, it is not a deserted campsite that our hero leaves, but rather the rich gardens of flowers and olive trees in Ifrane.

This kind of innovative re-rendering of ancient concepts, where old images are translated into new ones, is not very "modern" in and of itself. For example, the Andalusian poet Ibn Khafājah (d. 533/1138) re-rendered the desert description of the ancient hunting motif into a garden description.[575] Of course, our poet (the narrator) did not witness al-Īfrānī's journey to Illigh, but he relates it as if he had – or as if he knew – in a highly epicized manner that is appropriable to an older poetic paradigm. Thus, we may say that we perceive the time experienced only through the poet and his re-evaluation of it – which a rhetorical reading style would perhaps call "hyperbolic."

Moreover, to a modern Arabic reader, the vocabulary of al-Sūsī's poem is dense with curious word choices. Unusual and non-everyday Arabic words appear with a high frequency and they may make a challenging read for the modern reader. Reading words like *nājir* (as opposed to *ṣafar* for the second month in the Islamic

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Umayyad period – for the *qaṣīdah*, since this structure does not reflect all of pre-Islamic and later Abbasid poetry (Schippers, [1992: 73]; Bearman et al. [2012: keyword: "raḥīl"]). For example, in the case of Abbasid poetry the *raḥīl* seems to have lost its importance (or function) and was either shortened or left out completely (Bearman et al. [2012: keyword: "raḥīl"]).

[570] Hamori (1974: 22, fn. 25).
[571] Hamori (1974: 19).
[572] As argued in Sperl (1978: 32).
[573] Bearman et al. (2012: keyword: "mufākhara").
[574] Cf. Sperl (1978: 4).
[575] As shown in Schippers (1995: 210).

calendar), *fayfāʾ*, *tanūfah*, and *baydāʾ* (as opposed to *ṣaḥrāʾ* for 'desert'), and *āl* (as opposed to *sarāb* for 'mirage'), one is reminded of a foregone classical literary language and, indeed, the writer's conversance with it. Thus, al-Sūsī also manages to establish an intertextual relationship with an earlier poetic tradition through lexicon. Furthermore, these features of style and intertextuality may be read in light of the linguistic virtuosity (*barāʿah*) and continued use of classical literary formats and genres (incl. the *risālah*) that characterized the Moroccan literary scene from the beginnings of the *nahḍah* and far into the 20th century.[576]

It might be interesting to further expound on other ways in which this relatively lengthy poem appropriates (artistically) the classical Arabic poetic tradition. The initiating seven verses of the poem do not contain the conventional weeping or lamenting at the deserted campsite of the beloved, which is commonly recognized as characteristic of the (*aṭlāl-*)*nasīb*, but it does contain the mention of the separation (from the beloved) and other motifs that may allude to older Arabic poetry.

However, I am undecided as to whether these are allusions to the nightly vision of the beloved that is known as the *khayāl* or *ṭayf*, which is indeed also a motif from the *nasīb*, or the naturistic descriptions that since the 9th century have been able to replace the *nasīb* and function as a reflection of the subject of praise – the *mamdūḥ*:[577]

<div dir="rtl">

اليوم نظفر بالمنى جمعاء   لما رأينا وجهك الوضاء

الآن حق النذر حين تلألأت   تلك الأسرة بيننا لألأء

زمن طويل بعد فرقتنا مضى   ما كان إلا ليلة ليلاء

ظلم إلى ظلم تتابع غينها   واليوم زحزح نورك الظلماء

يا طالما كنا ارتقبنا يومنا   هذا؛ فهذا ظله قد فاء

فبأي محمدة تقابل زورة   ماست بها أعطافنا خيلاء

</div>

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[576] As noted by Parrilla (2006: 63-64, 73-74).

[577] Abū Tammām (d. 231/845 or 232/846) pioneered in replacing the *nasīb* with a description of spring and its greenery in this sense. This was an artistic move that became widely popular among fellow Arab and non-Arab poets alike, such as Jewish, Persian, and Turkish poets. See Bearman et al. (2012: keyword: "nawriyya").

أم أي شكر يستحق أب أتي   ليرى بفضل حنوه الأبناء[578]

Today, we attained all of our wishes, when we saw your beaming face

Now, the vow has been fulfilled, as those features joyously shine amongst us

A long time has passed since our separation; it was but one long, somber night

Darkness upon darkness urged its invasive covering [of the heart], but, today, your light has expelled the darkness

How often have we not awaited this day; and here is its shade that has returned

With what praise do you greet a visit, from which our limbs walk with a proud, swinging gait?

What thanks is due to the father who, owing to his compassion, came to see his children?

From the communication of al-Sūsī, here and elsewhere in the correspondence, it is quite obvious that we are not dealing with a horizontal relationship, but rather with a traditional vertical relationship of the teacher-student or father-son type that is defined by both authority (in knowledge and life experience) and benevolence. The theme of the father and the father-and-son relationship recurs in other lines of poetry and prose, which is something that will be further discussed later on.

A clear example of when poetry appears as an intradiegetic element, in this case in the form of a "character's" speech, is found in two letters written by Ibn Aḥmad and al-Sūsī respectively. It begins with Ibn Aḥmad relating that his younger son, Zayn al-ʿĀbidīn, sings the poetry of his cousin every evening.

[...] زين العابدين الذي يشنف أسماعنا في كل عشية بنغمة طفيلة بريئة من شعركم:

الحق حق وفيه   أحيا وألقى الحماما

فإن أعش فمحق   وأن[579] أمت فسلاما

وما أبالي إذا ما   حسنت ربي الختاما[580]

[…] Zayn al-ʿĀbidīn, who every evening pleases our ears with your poetry, chanted in an innocent, childish voice:

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[578] al-Sūsī (2015, pt. 3: 39).

[579] Sic.

[580] al-Sūsī (2015, pt. 2: 229-230). Bold in original.

True is the Truth: in the truth I live,

    and in it I shall meet the fate of death

If I live, I shall stay true,

    And if I die, farewell to life

Thus, I do not mind as long as

    You, my Lord, make the ending [to life] good

In an interpolation found in al-Sūsī's letter of response, he begins to reimagine the "then-and-there" moment of his addressee. In this instance, it is narrated that al-Sūsī the letter writer digresses from his letter writing for a moment and lets his thoughts wander to a company consisting of Ibn Aḥmad, his two sons, Sālim (nickname: "*jildat mā bayna al-ʿaynayn wa-al-anf*"[581]) and Zayn al-ʿĀbidīn, and the brother in-law of Ibn Aḥmad, Muḥammad ibn Dāwud:

وقفت هنيهة الآن أتصور داراً فاسية مزلجة مفروشة بالأثاث الفاسي؛ وفي جانب
منه المذياع يجلس حوله تحت أشعة الكهرباء إبراهيم بن أحمد ومحمد بن داود وجلدة
ما بين العينين والأنف (سالم) وقفز بين أيديهم: زين العابدين فذهب فكري في ذلك.
حتى كأنني أرى الحقيقة لا الخيال. وكأنني أسمع زين العابدين ينشد:

الحق حق وفيه   أحيا وألقى الحماما[582]

I have now stopped for a moment and imagine a modest home in Fez furnished in a Fezian style. In one of the corners of the home is a radio, around which Ibrāhīm bin Aḥmad, Muḥammad ibn Dāwud, and Sālim sit under the light of a lamp while Zayn al-ʿĀbidīn jumps around in front of them. It is where the thoughts wander away and it is as if I see it in reality and not in the imagination. It is almost as if I can hear Zayn al-ʿĀbidīn sing:

True is the Truth: in the truth I live,

and in it I shall meet the fate of death

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[581] Literally, "the piece of skin that lies between the eyes and the nose." To me, this nickname seems cryptic and I am not able to comment on its intended meaning.

[582] al-Sūsī (2015, pt. 2: 232). Bold in original.

Here, a pressing question might be: what could it mean when Ibn Aḥmad in our first example relates that his son recites the quite somber poetry of his cousin and lets those lines of poetry stand as a representation of his son's speech? And what is the implication of al-Sūsī's choice in the second example to reproduce a line of the poem as a representation of Zayn al-ʿĀbidīn's speech?

It might not be possible to give any straightforward answer to the above questions, since one could – and probably ought to – ask whose meaning making are we referring to? If one argues that it is the reader's meaning making that is being referred to, that would take us down a different, reader-centered route in approaching the question. Instead, if one answered the question by saying that it is the writer's meaning making that we are ultimately interested in, I would suggest that "story making" is the more appropriate and useful term to use in this context. In this way, we are looking at what is directly available to us, namely the actual text and its embedded elements, which arguably are the only conceivable "intentions" that are available to the reader.[583]

Therefore, the most plausible understanding of the above passages may not derive from solely looking at the actual content (meaning) of the specific lines of poetry that appear in them, but rather from their context. The main point of Ibn Aḥmad seems to be to relate an anecdote that demonstrates how close his cousin, al-Sūsī, is to him, and the extent to which al-Sūsī is still present in his life. This is accomplished through the idea of the youngest son reciting al-Sūsī's verses of poetry, which may appear as a conveyance of affection and appreciation to the cousin and as a testimony of commitment that further enhances the distance breaking and *confience* building potential of letter writing.[584]

Taking into consideration the verses' meaning, I have also formulated a hypothesis, albeit perhaps a little farfetched. The poetry, as a character's speech, may appeal to and further inform the dissenting role of al-Sūsī (and his associates) in the diegesis, that is, the world of the (epistolary) story. Thus, reconnecting to Phelan's argument, the poetry chanted by the innocent child constitutes a mediated telling, whereby the ethical imperative of speaking and living the Truth may paradoxically cause a person to lead a difficult life and meet a vengeful death.[585] By way of anecdote, these three verses of poetry are actually engraved on al-Sūsī's tombstone and just above them it is written that these verses were composed in the

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[583] Nayed (2011: 118-119).
[584] Altman (1982: 187-188). See also *confience* in the outline based on Altman in §5.1.
[585] Phelan (2017: 19).

prime of his youth, which could explain why the child acts as the mouthpiece for those three verses.

Nevertheless, it is evident that a contradictory and dissonant situation is being depicted in Ibn Aḥmad's anecdote, in which the young child with his innocent, childish voice recites verses with such a deliberately severe theme of sacrifice and death.

7.1.4 Masculine Performances and Self-Making

The image of the masculine is, time and again, shown to be quite complex and dynamic. Therefore, one ought to be careful not to take an automatized stance that takes popular gendered dichotomies for granted (e.g. rational[m]/irrational[f] or mind[f]/body[m]).[586] The emotional and psychological reality of male experiences repeatedly manifests itself in the correspondences of the present study and challenges any ahistorical, singular, and racialized generalizations of masculinity, "even within cultural categories such as 'Arab' and 'Muslim' [male]."[587]

As recent scholarship shows to an increasing extent, male experiences are indeed plural and we thus need to speak of "masculinities" rather than a singular masculinity.[588] Such an approach should also hold true for non-Western males and masculine performances, and, in a de-colonial manner, should also seek to "[…] understand masculinities as shaped by capitalism, colonialism, and imperialism, but also 'local' systems and ideas,"[589] and "[…] pay close attention to masculine embodiments and emotions and not only the abstract workings of ideology, law, institutions, and systems."[590]

The common and ancient trope of hyper-masculinity[591] that emphasizes, amongst other things, the experience of danger as stereotypically appealing clearly made its presence in the above "epic" poem, in praise of an elder to al-Sūsī. However, other features present that are commonly thought of as antithetical to the masculine,[592] like emotional outbursts and self-disclosures between peers,

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[586] As further argued by Hasso (2018: "Axiom 3" section, para. 1).

[587] Hasso (2018: "Axiom 1" section, para. 1).

[588] See, for example, Elsadda (2007; 2012), Armengol-Carrera (2009), and Hasso (2018). Also see "A Note on Homosociality and Masculinities" (§ 5.3).

[589] Hasso (2018: first section, para. 4).

[590] Hasso (2018: first section, para. 4).

[591] A concept that is here defined as "the exaggeration of masculine stereotypes such as aggression, dominance, strength, and physical prowess" (Griffin [2017: keyword: "hyper-masculinity"]).

[592] Bowman (2008) and Armengol-Carrera (2009: 193).

diversify the literary masculine performances and expectations of homosocial relationships between males, and indeed, male self-making. As Josep M. Armengol-Carrera's review of friendships between men in American literature curiously demonstrates,[593] men's emotions and expressivity carry within them a subversive and political potential in culture and literature and should not necessarily be mistaken for passivity, apoliticism, or quietism, as they often have been.

In the case of al-Sūsī, the potent themes of "brotherhood" (*al-ukhuwwah* or *al-ikhāʾ*) and fraternal love could also exemplify a kind of subversion through expressivity and emotions. For it is with the "brothers" (*al-ikhwān*) that true affinity, in mind and spirit, and a sense of existential and communal purpose are realized. For al-Sūsī, it seems that one of the true manifestations of this affinity in exile, other than the mere feeling of longing, is the world of dreams and imagination.

On multiple occasions, al-Sūsī brings into the narrative dreams and fantasies about the (re)union with his peers and students and about seeing them with his own eyes. All of this further accentuates the central role of sensing and the world of consciousness in the subversive call of al-Sūsī as a [male] anti-colonialist, nationalist, and religious reformist. For, in this case, the emotional and intellectual bonds between men seem to direct or guide them towards a sense of fulfilment and a shared cause that involves but also transcends the purely personal, and even the interpersonal.

A quite telling example of this is a passage found in the first letter sent in the correspondence between al-Sūsī and his cousin Ibn Aḥmad, in which al-Sūsī writes in the end of the letter, addressing both his cousin and his students:

فأنتم يا إخواني أمام عيني دائماً؛ ولن أنساكم:

يذكرني طلوع الشمس صخراً   وأذكره لكل غروب شمس

إن آسف على شيء هناك فإنما آسف عليكم يا أولادي. ويا حشاشات كبدي؛ فأنتم طريفي وتليدي؛ وأنتم مفاخري في اليوم وفي الغد. أنا أعلم أن هذا الفراق سيؤثر فيكم تأثيراً كبيراً. وإن نأى أستاذكم الذي هو عندكم كل شيء. سيبلغ منكم مبلغاً عظيماً. ولكن ما دمتم تقومون بما عليكم؛ وتؤدون لشعبكم ولدينكم ما هو فرض

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593 Armengol-Carrera (2009).

عليكم. فإن هذا الفراق كلا فراق. لا بدّ أن نفترق اليوم؛ لأن الظروف اقتضت ذلك؛ ولا بدّ أن نفترق اليوم لأن الظروف اقتضت ذلك. ولا بدّ أن نجتمع غداً لأن هذا الحال لا يدوم؛ وحذار حذار أن نلتقي غداً. فإذا بالبعض يدير عينيه في حجاجيه. كالزئبق في اليد الشلاء؛ فإن كان من لا يجعل المعالي أمام عينيه فنحن جميعاً منه براء. أوليس كذلك أيها الإخوان؟ وآخر وصاتي لكم أن كل من رأى منكم استعداداً لإتمام معلوماته على أي كان؛ وفي أي كيفية؛ وفي أي وسط تيسر؛ وعند أي أستاذ كان. كل من فيه ذلك الاستعداد ـ وما كل رجل منكم إلا فيه ذلك الاستعداد ـ ثم لم يستتم فهذا آخر معرفتي به.

وآنف من أخي لأبي وأمي   إذا ما لم أجده من الكرام 594

You, my brothers, are always in front of my eyes, and I will not forget you:

The sunrise reminds me of Ṣakhr

   And at every sunset, I remember him

If there is something that I am sad about over there, it is nothing but you, my children – the last sparks of life in my heart! For you are both my new- and old-possessed riches, and you are my source of pride, today and tomorrow. I know that this separation will affect you a lot and that the remoteness of your teacher – who is everything to you – will have a great impact on you. However, as long as you undertake that which you must and perform your duty toward the people and the religion, then, surely, this separation is by no means a separation. It is inevitable that we today are separated, because the circumstances have decided that; indeed, it is inevitable that we today are separated, because the circumstances have decided that.595 And it is inevitable that we reunite tomorrow, since this state will not last. So beware! Beware of us meeting tomorrow lest someone suddenly lets his gaze roam in the corner of his eyes, like mercury in a paralytic hand. If there is someone who does not devote himself to the noble causes, then we are all free from him. Is that not so my brethren? My last advice to you is that every one of you that sees himself in the position of completing his knowledge, on whatever that may be, in any way and in any circle available [to him], whoever the teacher may be, whoever is able to do that – and there is no

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594 al-Sūsī (2015, pt. 2: 212). Bold in original. Dated "22 *ramaḍān* 1356" (26 November 1937).

595 I believe that this repetition of the sentence in the original Arabic text is not an editorial mistake, but rather a rhetorical move of emphasis.

man amongst you except that he has this ability within him – and yet fails to do so, then this is my last acquaintance with him.

I scorn my brother in front of mother and father,

   if I do not find him being of the noble ones

The above passage is a good illustration of a complex and multifaceted male homosociality, in which one experiences love and bonding of the philiatic (brotherly/friendly), pragmatic (practical/collegial), and strogetic (familial) type. Concurrently, al-Sūsī affirms his position in relation to his addressees in both horizontal and vertical terms of power. The addressation moves quite quickly from using sentimental and affectionate words of imagination and longing to incorporating ones of a more assertive and even threatening kind, although coated or intertwined with affection, perhaps in the fashion that a stereotypical, patriarchal or leader-like figure would address and incite his male dependents.

Intertextually, al-Sūsī illustrates his sentimentality by quoting the popular verse of al-Khansāʾ (d. 24/646), in which the female poet laments the death of her brother Ṣakhr.[596] al-Khansāʾ's verse suggests a scenario in which a person is consumed by the memory of a no longer present loved one both day and night, which in itself implies insomnia. al-Sūsī then closes the letter in a different tone. He quotes a verse of poetry attributed to Abū al-Ṭayyib al-Mutanabbī (d. 354/965)[597] that essentially stresses that he will not hesitate to cut ties with anyone, even a brother by blood, whom he deems has lost sight of the "good causes" in life, that is, in this case, the search for knowledge that stems from a sense of religious and patriotic duty.

Again, literariness is also evident in the phraseology and lexicon of al-Sūsī's letter writing. For example, he demonstrates a careful balancing of phrases and a fondness for parallelism on the semantic level, such as in the address: "*fa-antum ṭarīfī wa-talīdī, wa-antum mafākhirī fī al-yawm wa-al-ghadd*" ('For you are both my new- and old-possessed riches, and you are my source of pride, today and tomorrow'). In addition, the address contains the old idiom "*al-ṭarīf wa-al-talīd*" (as in '*al-ḥadīth wa-al-qadīm*' for 'the new and old; the new- and old-possessed [thing]').[598]

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[596] The verse that is attributed to al-Khansāʾ have been transmitted in many places, such as in *Kitāb al-aghānī* by Abū al-Faraj al-Iṣfahānī (d. 356/967) (1993, vol. 17: 178).

[597] See the critical edition of ʿAbd al-Raḥmān al-Barqūqī (2014: 1258, verse 787).

[598] Lane (1864: keyword: "t-l-d").

Returning to the subversive and political potential of male emotions and expressivity, I would like to argue that, in this non-Western context, emotions and expressivity are not necessarily subversive because they are signs of male emotionality, but rather that this potential lies in the colonial setting in which they take place.

Looking at it from an Arabic literary historical perspective, male emotionality, in the sense of being a quality or behavior relating to emotions and/or exhibiting emotions, often in an excessive or accentuated way, does not seem to be antithetical to masculine literary models within the tradition. However, as has been noted above, alongside this emotional code of masculinity, one does find hyper-masculine images that male poets and prose artists utilized to express themselves in their literary productions.

A quite clear example of two such conventions of a masculine literary model would be the emotional code of the *ʿudhrī*-poets[599] Jamīl ibn Maʿmar (d. 85/701) and Kuthayyir ibn ʿAbd al-Raḥmān (d. 107/723), versus the hyper-masculine heroic or chivalric code of the epic poetic genre, *al-ḥamāsah* ('bravery; valour').[600] Moreover, when speaking of these two conventions, it must be noted that one code does not have to exclude the other, since both (the de-emphasis and emphasis of emotionality) can exist within one literary model of masculinity.

An archetypal example of such a protean literary model of masculinity would be the chivalric poetry of the pre-Islamic poet ʿAntarah ibn Shaddād (d. 608). Besides depicting his skills and courageous nature in the battlefield (*wa-l-khaylu taʿlamu wa-l-fawārisu annanī shaykhu l-ḥurūbi wa-kahluhā wa-fatāhā* 'the horses and the horsemen know that I am the elder of war, its middle-aged, and its youngster'), ʿAntarah also accounts for the emotional dimension of the male experience:

<div dir="rtl">

يا عَبلَ قَد هامَ الفُؤادُ بِذِكرِكُم   وَأرى دُيوني ما يَحُلُّ قَضاها

يا عَبلَ إن تَبكي عَلَيَّ بِحُرقَةٍ   فَلَطالَما بَكَتِ الرِجالُ نِساها[601]

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[599] *ʿUdhrī* poetry is an elegiac amatory genre that emerged during the Umayyad period amongst the poets of the ʿUdhrah tribe that inhabited the northern part of the Hijāz. See Bearman et al. (2012: keyword: "ʿudhrī").

[600] Bearman et al. (2012: keyword: "ḥamāsa").

[601] *al-Dīwān*, online database, keyword: "ʿAntarah ibn Shaddād"; "qif bi-d-diyāri wa-ṣiḥ ilá baydāh."

ʿAblah, my heart is distracted by your remembrance,

[this endless remembrance] is as debts of mine that are never settled

ʿAblah, if you cry over me vehemently,

O' how long have the men cried over their women

Now, returning to the correspondences of al-Sūsī, when viewing the features of emotions and expressivity in the light of the context in which they appear, they are at once an affirmation of literary models of male performance and self-making and a combined force for a subversive cause. Male emotions and expressivity are, in this respect, implicitly a self-rewarding of independence that disconnects the subjects from the colonial and (re)connects them to what is deemed indigenous in literature and culture. Thus, in a colonial setting, male homosociality, in the sense of non-sexual or non-romantic same-sex relationships between men, appears to carry within it the potential, and probably even the ambition, to challenge and subvert that colonial setting.

The male expressivity and the social bonding within which it often emanates are not only subversive vis-à-vis a colonial establishment and their native allies, but a religious establishment too. The Salafists' defiant and iconoclastic approach to institutionalized religion, mainly the religion of the *zāwiyyah* (the Sufi lodge), may also be tied to this subversive and political potential of homosociality and its expressions. Although al-Sūsī arguably never denounced Sufism, when "purified" from the criticized practices or beliefs, he did adopt the Salafist creed when he encountered the nationalist movement in the larger cities of Fez, Marrakech, and Rabat.[602]

As has been indicated earlier, we find what almost appears as a rejection, or at the very least a diminishing, of kinsfolk – including fellow (Illighite) landsmen – in favor of the homosocial bonds and friendships between non-kinsfolk that unite men, in this case, in mind and spirit, with the exception of his cousin Ibn Aḥmad, who more than once fails al-Sūsī in terms of reciprocity in the epistolary engagement. In a letter sent to his friend Aḥmad al-Manjrah,[603] al-Sūsī praises his loyal and pure friendship towards an exiled friend, a friendship that has been tested and proven by the trial of time. As al-Sūsī asserts, al-Manjrah demonstrates his loyalty through both his heart and his pen; that is, reciprocal letter writing (*yā man*

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[602] al-Zirkilī (2002, vol. 7: 92) and El-Adnani (2007: 43).
[603] al-Sūsī (2015, pt. 3: 116-125)

wafá bi-qalbihi wa-bi-yarāʿih ['you, who have been loyal through the heart and the pen!']).[604]

However, al-Sūsī is often at variance with his perception of kin- and non-kin and home and outside-of-home. al-Sūsī's sometimes extreme declarations in favor of the latter categories are perhaps best understood as hyperboles of literary and poetic language. Alternatively, or jointly, it could be yet another symptom of the naturally fragmented and incoherent self that is found in the autobiographical subject,[605] since being in exile in his hometown Illigh, as will be shown below, does also have its advantages.

Indeed, al-Sūsī mentions what a stranger he is in Illigh, where people ask questions about him and look at him as an urban man (due to his urban appearance and dress). al-Sūsī writes that he lives in a kind of isolation and solitude that would be more fitting for a Sufi who has not yet absorbed the social and fraternal spirit, that is, someone who would commit himself to *khalwah* (spiritual retreat)[606] and the adventures of purifying his soul and searching for blemishes in his heart.[607] In fact, the impact of his exilic environment – albeit being "home" – on his person is such that he has become the opposite of the cheery and outgoing person that he used to be. This is exemplified by the image of the lonely writer and the following quoted verses that are attributed to the linguist Ibn Fāris al-Rāzī (d. 395/1004):[608]

[...] فأداني الحال حتى غلب عليَّ الانقباض والاختلاء وحدي. ودفتري على ركبتي. والدواة عن يميني. واليراع يتحرك في أصابعي. من مطلع الشمس لغروبها. ثم تبتدئ السلسلة أمام السراج. فلو كانت عندي هرة. لصح في ما قاله أحد الأدباء قبلي :

يقولون كيف حالك قلت خير   تقضي حاجة وتفوت حاج

إذا ازدحمت هموم الصدر قلنا   عسى يوماً يكون لها انفراج

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[604] al-Sūsī (2015, pt. 3: 117).

[605] Smith and Watson (2010: 21-61).

[606] *Khalwah* is a technical term within Sufi or mystic practice that refers to the act of spiritual seclusion or retirement, the "isolation in a solitary place or cell" that includes spiritual exercises and disciplining. See Bearman et al. (2012: keyword: "khalwa").

[607] al-Sūsī (2015, pt. 3: 118).

[608] The quoted verses and their attribution to Ibn Fāris al-Rāzī can be found in *Wafayāt al-aʿyān* by Ibn Khallikān (d. 681/1282) (1838: 51).

سميري هرتي وأنيس نفسي   دفاتر لي ومعشوقي السراج[609]

[…] the situation drove me until the gloom and solitude got the better of me. My notebook is in my lap, the inkwell is on my right, and the pen is moving between my fingers, from sunrise to sunset. After that, the cycle begins [all over again] in front of the lantern. If only I had a cat, then the words of one of the litterateurs before me would have been true [for me as well]:

"How are you," they asked me. "Fine," I said

　"A need is fulfilled while another one slips away

When worries constrict the heart, I say:

　Perhaps, one day, they will be dispelled

My cat is my nightly converser, and my soul's companion

are my notebooks, and the lantern is my beloved"

al-Sūsī goes on to say that all days and months appear to be the same to him; he only senses the change of seasons when summer turns into winter. Further building on the monotony of life away from the city and like-minded friends, he writes that there is no pleasure or excitement to be found in anything in his current state. Not even the Eid holidays bring him any excitement anymore, since during them, he is only able to see his wife, his son ʿAbd Allāh, the children of his siblings, and the devotees of the Sufi lodge (*zāwiyah*).[610]

Nevertheless, the ambivalence of exile soon kicks in and al-Sūsī is bound to emphasize that life is not always doom and gloom. For he sometimes finds solace in writing verse, rhymed prose, or simple prose, and, at other times, in reviewing and correcting the biographical writings on savants of the region authored before him. He alternates between these activities as in the descriptive simile that he presents in the same letter:

تنقل المتجول بين أصص الأزهار المختلفة الألوان. الفائحة الريا. المصطفة في المنتزهات. فأجد من الروح والطمأنينة والابتهاج وسكرة ما أنا أنجح فيه ما يخيل إليَّ أنني أسعد الناس في هذه الحياة.[611]

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[609] al-Sūsī (2015, pt. 3: 118-119). Bold in original.
[610] al-Sūsī (2015, pt. 3: 119).
[611] al-Sūsī (2015, pt. 3: 119).

[Like] the roaming of the one that strolls between the pots of colorful, fragrant flowers that are placed throughout the parks. [Here,] I find, in the form of relief, quietude of mind, joy, and rapture by that which I succeed in; that which makes me feel that I am the happiest person in the world.

Another source of joy and comfort appears to be al-Sūsī's wife, Umm ʿAbd Allāh. On al-Manjrah praying for their happy married life, al-Sūsī writes reassuringly to his friend:

طالباً من الله أن يكثر تيهها ودلالها عليَّ. فإن دعاءك مستجاب. فلا تسل عما فعلته لواعج الهوى بأخيك من صيادة القلوب:

ته دلالا فالحب قد أعطاكَا   وتحكم فالحسن قد ولاكا

فكلما أجلت منها النظرات في الوجنات. تتابعت الزفرات يأخذ بعضها بذيل بعض :

يزيدك وجهه حسناً   إذا ما زدته نظرا[612]

I ask God to increase her pride over me and her care for me. Your prayer has been answered, so do not ask about what the ardor of love, caused by the huntress of hearts, has done with your brother:

Be proud in your coquetry, since Love has given you the right to be

And take the power to command, since Beauty [itself] has made you governor [over me]

Whenever her glances linger in the corner of the eye, one sigh follows another:

You become more beautiful,

   the more you look at your beloved's face

With regard to the first inserted verse, al-Sūsī borrows and somewhat alters a line of poetry by the poet and Sufi ʿUmar ibn ʿAlī ibn al-Fāriḍ (d. 632/1235) that originally read:

ته دلالا فأنت أهل لذاكا   وتحكم فالحسن قد أعطاكا[613]

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[612] al-Sūsī (2015, pt. 3: 124). Bold in original.
[613] Nāṣir al-Dīn (2019: 152, verse 1).

Be proud in your coquetry, for that is your right to be

And take the power to command, since Beauty has given you leave

There seems to be a desire to transfer the original Sufi meaning of Ibn al-Fāriḍ's verse to one more fitting for the theme of marital love. At first glance, these lines of poetry may be quite difficult to wrap one's head around due to their metaphorical potency, which is perhaps also true for the second inserted verse ("*yazīduka wajhuhu ḥusnan...*" ['You become more beautiful…']), which has variously been attributed to the two Abbasid poets Abū Nuwās al-Ḥasan al-Ḥakamī (d. *ca.* 199/814) and ʿAbd al-Ṣamad al-Muʿadhdhil (d. *ca.* 240/853).[614]

An interpretation of Ibn al-Fāriḍ's verse, presented in the critical edition of Mahdī Muḥammad Nāṣir al-Dīn,[615] explains that the poet addresses the true beloved (i.e. God). In this interpretation, *tayh* (here, *takabbur*, 'pride; loftiness') – as in the above imperative "*tih*" ('be proud') – is a metonym (*kināyah*) for the lover's contentment (*riḍā*) and the imperative "*taḥakkam*" ('command') is similarly a metonym for creatures' submission to the Creator. However, considering the wording and imagery of the entire poem, I would argue that the addressee is more likely not God, but rather the Prophet Muḥammad. This view is shared by the orientalist Arthur John Arberry (d. 1969) who acknowledges the poem as "a hymn to the Spirit of Muḥammad."[616]

Be that as it may, the underlying, non-literal mystic meaning of the original verse does not seem to apply to al-Sūsī's rendition of it, since the poet appears to address neither God nor the Prophet. The beloved's right of having *tayh* ('pride') and sovereignty, or governance, over the lover is conditionally bestowed on her by love (*al-ḥubb*) and beauty (*al-ḥusn*) themselves.

By incorporating the poetry of his predecessors, al-Sūsī demonstrates his own knowledge of the poetic tradition. The seemingly spontaneous manner in which he transits to poetry – without attribution to the verses' originators – only seems to accentuate that knowledge. This literary move is reminiscent of the well-established rhetorical device, *taḍmīn* ('inclusion; quotation').[617] However, the altered verse by Ibn al-Fāriḍ may rather be a case of *sariqah* ('plagiarism') of the *ikhtirāʿ* ('invention') kind, where the poet makes purposeful changes to the

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[614] al-Dasūqī (2007: 447).
[615] Nāṣir al-Dīn (2019: 152, fn. 1).
[616] Arberry (1956: 70).
[617] Bearman et al. (2012: keyword: "taḍmīn").

borrowed verse.[618] In this case, al-Sūsī changed the wordings of the original verse in order for it to be placed within a new context, as argued above.

In the introductory words of al-Sūsī to the verse ("*fa-lā tasal ʿammā faʿalatʿhu lawāʿij al-hawá bi-akhīk [...]*" – 'so do not ask about what the ardor of love has done with your brother […]'), and through the verse itself, the letter writer is curiously admitting a lack of agency and a vertical positioning in terms of romantic love. As a male subject, he is overruled by his beloved – and rightly so. When the poet says that looking at the beloved's face beautifies the beholder, the statement may be interpreted as the beauty of the beloved begins to reflect itself in the one doing the action of looking and who – the more they look – becomes like a mirror of their beloved.

The face of the object of one's love or admiration is a recurring image in the Arabic poetic tradition throughout time. It is therefore perhaps not a surprise that al-Sūsī would utilize this convention and, in a way, directly allude to it by quoting a verse attributed to Abū Nuwās. In his key work of *adab, al-ʿIqd al-farīd* ('The Unique Necklace'), the Andalusian writer and poet Ibn ʿAbd Rabbih (d. 328/940) makes an interesting distinction between *al-jamīlah* and *al-malīḥah*, which both in essence refers to a beautiful woman. Whereas the former (*al-jamīlah*) catches the eye of the admirer from afar, but whose beauty and grace decreases with proximity, the latter (*al-malīḥah*) only increases in beauty and grace the closer and the more one looks, that is, with proximity.[619]

Other than demonstrating a conversance with older literature, the strong feelings of romantic or marital love and intimacy that al-Sūsī seems to want to convey appear to be convenient for and facilitated by his exilic state, which is indeed closely tied to the domestic and to his own development as a writer in different genres or literary modes, as illustrated above.

7.1.5 Concluding Segment One: *al-Illighiyyāt*

This first segment of the analysis placed Muḥammad al-Mukhtār al-Sūsī's correspondences with his cousin Ibn Aḥmad, his friend Aḥmad al-Manjrah, and his former teacher Shaykh al-Īfrānī at its center, investigating the letters' literary and narrative themes and properties.

Several examples of thematic and creative recycling and appropriations of both pre-modern and modern literature from the Eastern (Arabic) and Western

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[618] Bearman et al. (2012: "sariḳa").
[619] Ibn ʿAbd Rabbih (1983, Vol. 7: 126)

(European) literary traditions were identified. The analysis further discussed these features of intertextuality and situated them in relation to the epistolary "I"-character, the discursive world of male experience(s), and the homosocial relationships between men that are constructed and maintained in that discursive world.

The elements of thematic and creative recycling and appropriations that accentuate the literariness of the letter texts may be summarized as follows:

- 'The setting, the action, the writer, and the writing' components of diary fiction (Western/European).
- Dialogs/direct discourses (mimesis) and stylization of speech.
- Prosimetrum; thematic and narrative functions of poetry.
- Themes and images from pre-modern (classical) Arabic literature (including pre-Islamic poetry).
- Phraseology and lexicon in general (archaic/classical literary style and prevalence of rhetorical figures).

Moreover, the emotional and psychological reality of male experiences that repeatedly manifest themselves in the literary delivery of the letters challenges ahistorical, singular, and racialized generalizations of masculinity in these epistolary contexts. The analysis also discussed how al-Sūsī's correspondence shows that male emotions and expressivity may carry within them a subversive and political potential in literature and culture. This, in turn, would confute the notion that male emotions and expressivity are signs of passivity or quietism and further highlight the ethical dimension of the letter texts.

For al-Sūsī, it seems that male emotions, expressivity, and homosociality can act as a self-rewarding of independence that disconnects the subject from the colonial and (re)connects the subject to what is deemed indigenous in literature and culture.

Thus, I would argue that the letters sampled from *al-Illighiyyāt* do indeed carry within them a literary genius that can be explained by using intertextual tools that reveal a prevalence of thematic and creative recycling and appropriation of literary traditions and conventions. Therefore, the letters not only carry within them a documentary and biographical value, but also a literary and aesthetic one that is informed by more than one tradition.

7.2 Segment Two: *Rasāʾil al-Shābbī* ('al-Shābbī's Letters')

This segment continues the analytical focus on epistolary characters and the male letter writers' formations of discursive worlds in private letters. However, the correspondences found in al-Ḥulaywī's *Rasāʾil al-Shābbī* call for somewhat different analytical perspectives than the letters analyzed in the first segment, given these letters' own thematics and particularities. This time, the narrative discourse mediates stories pertaining to the characters' dynamics and personages (§ 7.2.1 and § 7.2.2), mental health (§ 7.2.3), and physical illness (§ 7.2.5), and these storylines, in turn, generate the thematic structure and focus of the analysis. The analysis maintains the theoretical concept of diverse and dynamic masculinities and male homosociality and, similarly to "Segment One" (§ 7.1), places its findings in relation to the discursive world of male experience(s) and the homosocial relationships that are entertained therein (§ 7.2.7).

7.2.1 Characters' Dynamics: Mythicizing Discourses

The homosocial, friendship-based relationships that are entertained in *Rasāʾil al-Shābbī* are characterized by a dynamics of both relational symmetries and asymmetries between the parties involved (al-Shābbī, al-Ḥulaywī, and al-Bashrūsh). Such dynamics are reflected in an ebb and flow of criticism, reproach, admiration, advice, humility, and self-abasement. It is such characters' dynamics and their textual representation that the current section (§ 7.2.1) and the section (§ 7.2.2) that follows identify and discuss.

An eye-catching part of the characters' dynamics is the recurrences of a discourse that promotes a mythicization of al-Shābbī by using a mythological or religious storyline. While "myth" is not an arbitrary choice of word, I recognize that it can be ambigious and deserves some clarification about its usage within the context of this study. Rather than providing an account of the many different ancient and modern approaches to and understandings of "myth," I will explain how the term is most relevantly used and understood in relation to our current letter texts. Here, myth is inclusively defined as "specific culturally charged symbols, images or tales,"[620] that:

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[620]   des Bouvrie (2002: 58).

may take on many different forms and functions – as associated with gods and
rituals, as affirmations or charters of lands, titles, institutions and beliefs, as
explanations at various levels and as problem-exploring and problem-palliating
in various ways, and as providing different kinds of mental and emotional relief
and support.[621]

Therefore, "mythicizing" or "mythicization" is here understood as the discursive
or narrative process of enveloping, incorporating, or turning something or someone
into myth, or treating something or someone as myth by means of language.[622]

Out of the three letter writers, al-Ḥulaywī is undeniably the correspondent who
is most keen to adopt a mythicizing discourse about al-Shābbī. In the following
excerpt from a letter sent from Béni Khalled in February 1933, al-Ḥulaywī vouches
for al-Shābbī using wordings that pertain to an already known confessional
language, namely, the religious language of the Islamic tradition.

وأنا الذي أول من آمن برسالتك بل وأنا الذي حييت فيك ـ منذ صدور الخيال الشعري
ـ زعيما جريئا لحركة التجديد الادبي بتونس. ريثما أحي فيك الرسول الذي أدى
رسالة الادب.[623]

I am the first to believe [*āmana*] in your message [*risālatika*]; rather, I am the
one who in you – ever since the dawn of *The Poetic Imagination* [*al-Khayāl
al-shiʿrī*] – have seen a brave leader for the literary reformist movement in
Tunisia. Since, in you, I see the Messenger [*al-rasūl*] who was sent to convey the
Message of Literature [*risālat al-adab*].

Here, the word *risāla* is not employed in the sense of 'letter' or 'missive,' but rather
in its Quranic and Ḥadīthic sense of 'message,' as in:

فَتَوَلَّى عَنْهُمْ وَقَالَ يَا قَوْمِ لَقَدْ أَبْلَغْتُكُمْ رِسَالَةَ رَبِّي وَنَصَحْتُ لَكُمْ وَلَكِن لاَّ تُحِبُّونَ
النَّاصِحِينَ[624]

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[621] Dundes (1984: 58).

[622] This understanding carries resemblences to Roland Barthes' definition of myth as a process
(of coded language or communication), whereby practically anything can be turned into
myth, mainly through pre-existing materials in the form of symbols and icons. See
Buchanan (2018: keyword: "myth").

[623] al-Ḥulaywī (1966: 103).

[624] al-Aʿrāf (The Elevations) 7:79, via www.koranensbudskap.se.

> And he [i.e., Ṣāliḥ] turned away from them, and said, "O my people, I had certainly conveyed to you **the message** of my Lord [*risālat rabbī*], and advised you, but you do not like advisors.[625]

However, in the case of our text, it is not the divine message [of the Lord] that al-Shābbī is destined to convey, but instead, the Message of Literature. In the same figurative sense, al-Ḥulaywī uses the word *rasūl* in the meaning of 'messenger' or 'apostle' as an epithet for al-Shābbī. This usage of the word *rasūl* may be a way of praising his friend and promoting his distinguishable role within the literary scene, whether regionally or globally (which of these is the case is not clear). Moreover, in an earlier letter from 26 March 1930, one also finds that al-Ḥulaywī asserts that his friend is "an unknown prophet [*nabīʾ majhūl*]" amongst his people.[626] What further argues for the confessional spirit of the passage is the use of the verb *āmāna* in relation to al-Shābbī's message (*anā alladhī awwal man **āmana bi-risālatik***, 'I am the first to believe in your message'). Here, the verb *āmāna* is clearly used in the sense of '[a firm] believing [with the heart],'[627] rather than any possible secular sense of the word.

Within the cultural context of the letter writers, one may naturally wonder whether the adoption of such religious language verges on the blasphemous. On another occasion in December 1933,[628] al-Ḥulaywī seeks the opinion of al-Shābbī concerning the translation of a verse of a poem that for some parts of society would be blasphemous (Arabic title by al-Ḥulaywī: *Thawrat al-ʿaql*), by the French Romantic author Alfred de Vigny (d. 1863). In his letter of response, al-Shābbī gives him the following legitimizing response:

<div dir="rtl">

ولو شئت ان اسوق لك الابيات التي لى غرار بيتك هذا في التشبيه بالالاه[629] والآله لا كثرت[630] وخرج بى القلم عن غايته ولكنك سترى ذلك في الديوان ان شاء الله. واننى لاعمق ايماننا[631] من كل احد حينما أعبر بهاته التعابير الكافرة في نظر أولائك الناس. فالألوهية وما تصدر منها هى رمز للمثل العليا التي نصبو اليها بأرواحنا

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625 English translation by Ṣaḥeeḥ International (2004 [1997]: 144). First bracket by translator, the second bracket and bold by me. See *The Qurʾān: English Meanings*.

626 al-Ḥulaywī (1966: 49).

627 See Lane (1864: keyword: "a-m-n").

628 al-Ḥulaywī (1966: 129). The letter was sent from Béni Khalled and is dated "13 December 1933."

629 Sic.

630 Sic.

631 Sic.

ونشخص اليها بأبصارنا في هاته الحياة ولذلك فاذا أردنا ان نعبر عن معنى نحس له
بجلال المثل الأعلى وسموه فانما سبيلنا في ذلك ان نفرغ عليه رداء الالوهية التي
هي ما تتصوره الانسانية من جمال المثل الاعلى وجلاله. وهذا كلام قد لا يفهمه
أولئك الناس [...] [632]

> If you wanted me to cite to you all of my verses that like this verse of yours use likening to god and deities, they would indeed be many and my pen would take me outside of its objective. Nevertheless, you will see it in the *dīwān* [collection of poems] – God willing. Truly, my faith in God is more profound than anyone else's faith when I express [myself] with these, according to those people [the conservatives], blasphemous expressions. Divinity – and what is derived from it – is a symbol of the ideals that we incline towards with our souls and fix our eyes on during this life. Therefore, if we want to express a notion in which we feel the sublimity and loftiness of the ideal,[633] our way is nothing but to clothe it in the garment of the divine, which is what the human conceives of the beauty and splendor of the ideal. These are utterances that those people perhaps would not understand […]

Thus, for al-Shābbī, there appears to exist a poetic license that allows writers to express themselves freely and intuitively, even if the expressions on the surface level could be interpreted as blasphemous (*kāfirah*). Furthermore, he urges al-Ḥulaywī to create and convey art with a sincerity that does not take into consideration the "inspecting crowds" (*afwāj al-naẓārah*), which appears to be the mindset of the self-actualized and honest artist.[634]

In an earlier passage in the same letter, al-Shābbī prompts al-Ḥulaywī to be faithful to the truth, art, and history, and accordingly, transparently and fearlessly write about de Vigny as "God has created him, and Who alone will hold him accountable and damn him, not as those human vermin that Tunisia has been

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[632] al-Ḥulaywī (1966: 131). The letter was sent from Tozeur and is dated "19/12/33."

[633] Here, and later, al-Shābbī uses the wording "*al-mathal al-aʿlá*." While the first appearance of "*muthul* [plural of *mathal*] *al-ʿulyá*" is clearly used in sense of 'ideals,' it should be noted that, in the latter two instances, al-Shābbī probably plays on the two meanings of the phrase "*al-mathal al-aʿlá*": 'ideal' and 'the highest or loftiest description [of God].' In the case of the latter sense of the phrase, the English translation would be: "[…] a notion in which we feel the sublimity of the highest description [of God] and its loftiness, our way is nothing but to clothe it in the garment of the divine, which is what the human conceives of the beauty and splendor of [the highest description]."

[634] al-Ḥulaywī (1966: 131).

afflicted with would like [us to], taking them into consideration in every matter […].”[635]

al-Ḥulaywī's mythicizing discourse around al-Shābbī clearly portrays an asymmetrical aspect of their intimate friendship. As a part of his friend's idolization and ardent admiration, al-Shābbī is consequently elevated to a savior and leader status. Yet, al-Ḥulaywī proclaiming to be the first believer in the [literary or poetic] Message of al-Shābbī also speaks of a philosophical and ideological affinity between the two parties.

Upon al-Shābbī's insistent requests that al-Ḥulaywī should write the introduction to his *dīwān* (collection of poems), al-Ḥulaywī declines the offer and explains why. In his explanation, al-Ḥulaywī plays with his wording, which further creates parallels to a religious discourse about revelation. In this instance, it is not divine revelation that descends to human life, but al-Shābbī's collection of poems. If one continues to build on the imagery of revelation, one may say, and al-Ḥulaywī did, that like revelation, al-Shābbī's *dīwān* ought first to be received by the people in its pure, untouched form:

أما مقدمة الديوان فاني لن اكتبها لانى اكره المقدمات واكرهها لك وخير للديوان أن ينزل الى «الحياة» أعزل بسيطا غير محاط بسياج من التعاليق والشروح والتعقيبات على طريقة أبى شادى.[636]

> As for the introduction to the *dīwān*, for I will not write it, because I detest introductions and I would hate such a thing for you. It is better for the *dīwān* to descend down to life unarmed and simple, unfenced by comments, interpretations, and criticism in the manner of Abū Shādī.[637]

However, this kind of ardent admiration with its intense language is often met and countered with humility and self-abasement. It is also worth noting that the admiration seems to be mutual between the two parties, although perhaps less hyperbolic in its wording on al-Shābbī's part. Dodging praise and a general tendency to resort to self-abasement when talking about oneself, and about one's artistic ability and production in particular, reoccurs in all three correspondences

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[635] al-Ḥulaywī (1966: 130).

[636] al-Ḥulaywī (1966: 155). The letter was sent from Korba (Qurbah) and is dated 28 June 1934.

[637] The Egyptian journalist and poet Aḥmad Zakī Abū Shādī (d. 1374/1955), who founded the journal *Apollo*.

and is a discursive phenomenon that rearranges the asymmetries established or introduced by the other party.

Regarding the idea that al-Shābbī would have a message (*risālah*) to convey during his lifetime, al-Shābbī responds to al-Ḥulaywī with an immediate degradation of both the idea itself and himself. It is worth noting that al-Shābbī's self-abasement takes place directly after he laments his own possible death before having conveyed his message (of life) (*risālat al-dunyā*), as if instantly alerting himself to a kind of hubris:

رسالة! أى سخافة وأى جنون؟ كبرت الكلمة ينطق بها فمى ويكتبها قلمى على صفحة
هذا القرطاس. ومن أنا حتى أؤمل هذا الأمل أو انتخب لهاته الغاية؟ ان أنا الا صدفة
مكسورة تضطرب في لجة الزمان وستمسى بدادا في أكف الرياح المظلمة اليوم أو
غدا.[638]

Message! What kind of silliness and madness is this? The word [i.e. "message"] weighs heavy in my mouth as it utters it and on my pen as it writes it down on this sheet of paper. Who am I to entertain such a hope or be elected for such a cause? I am nothing but a thwarted coincidence that wanders about in the abyss of time and that will become scattered [pieces] in the palms of the dark winds, either today or tomorrow.

7.2.2 Characters' Dynamics: Criticism and Censure between Friends

An important aspect of the characters' dynamics is criticism and reproach (censure) and it is worthy of its own heading because of the palpable and potentially dismantling effects it may have on the symmetries and asymmetries that exist in interpersonal relationships.

Criticism (*naqd*) and reproach (*ʿitāb*) are traditional themes within the Arabic epistolographic tradition[639] and they are definitely an integral part of the friendship between our three Tunisian letter writers. However, the fact that this aspect of their friendship ought to be on equal terms is not always taken for granted or even desirable. In a letter written in January 1930, al-Ḥulaywī confesses that he is afraid to share any critical comment about al-Shābbī's literary critical essay, *al-Khayāl*

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[638] al-Ḥulaywī (1966: 99). The letter was sent from Tozeur and is dated "26/10 [*shawwāl*]/1351" (22 February 1933).

[639] For a pre-modern example, see point 4 in the outline of al-Kalāʿī's formulary in "Pre-Modern Forms" (§ 3.1).

al-shiʿrī ('The Poetic Imagination') (1933), in fear of creating animosity between them:

لو تدرى ياخى كم تنازعت مع نفسى فى شان هذا النقد لعذرتنى عن التأخير والتوانى فى اتمامه حتى اليوم. فقد كنت حريصا جد الحرص على صداقتك، ضنينا بها ضن الشحيح بماله وكنت أخاف أن تصدر منى كلمة او رأى يكون سببا فى سوء التفاهم بيننا ذلك ان شيطان النقد كثيرا ما زرع بذور الشقاق بين الأحباء.[640]

> If you only knew – my brother – how torn I was about this matter of criticism [*naqd*], you would forgive the delay and negligence of its fulfillment as of yet. I have been very solicitous, respecting your friendship and tenaciously holding onto it, like the miser holds on to his wealth. I was afraid that a word or an opinion from me would sow the seed of misunderstanding between us, and that is because the devil of criticism often creates discord between loved ones.

The above excerpt reveals yet another asymmetrical aspect to al-Ḥulaywī and al-Shābbī's friendship, although, as it appears in the letter text, this asymmetry is not upheld and entertained by the party with the upper hand, al-Shābbī, but by al-Ḥulaywī, who seems to enable a kind of subservience to his friend. Thus, the asymmetry that is voiced in al-Ḥulaywī's letter is most clearly exemplified in his almost compulsive wish to stay an ardent admirer of his friend in fear of the repercussions of candor or authenticity. al-Ḥulaywī explicitly asks to remain an admirer distant from the general (critical) readership and a partner (*sharīk*) in all of al-Shābbī's views,[641] which can be understood as an emotional or behavioral means to desist or refrain from criticism.

Interestingly, in a letter written in Nefta by al-Bashrūsh to al-Ḥulaywī, dated "7 December 1933," al-Bashrūsh also seems to hint at the persuasive and stubborn features of al-Shābbī's character and his own subservience in a matter of differing desires. The issue at hand, which remains unclear in the text, concerns al-Shābbī, who had discarded al-Bashrūsh's wishes and acted at his own discretion. al-Bashrūsh admits to al-Ḥulaywī his weakness before al-Shābbī's strong, stubborn nature; a weakness that almost seems inevitable: "[…] I cannot but weaken before him and I have indeed been weak…" ("[…] *lā astaṭīʿu maʿahu ghayr al-ḍuʿf wa-qad kuntu ḍaʿīfan…*").[642]

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[640] al-Ḥulaywī (1966: 41).
[641] al-Ḥulaywī (1966: 41).
[642] al-Ḥulaywī (1966: 178).

Here, one might not want to rule out the possibility of a co-enabling process of creating asymmetries within the epistolary context of their friendship. Nonetheless, al-Shābbī does confront al-Ḥulaywī's unwillingness to provide him with constructive criticism in a letter of response:

لا أظن الصداقة تقف الى هذا الحد فى التعرض لحركات العقول لان الصداقة انما

هى ضرب من حرية الروح ويقظة الفكر وانتباه العواطف فان كانت تشل من حركة

العقل وتصفد من أعضاد القرائح والعقول فلا كانت هذه الصداقة ولا كان قلب يحبوها

شيئا من حنوه وحنانه.643

> I do not believe that friendship only goes as far as that in terms of preventing commotions of minds, since friendship is nothing but a kind of freedom of the soul, a wakefulness of thought and attentiveness of feelings. If it were to be paralyzed by the exercise of reason and fettered by the strong arms of great talents and minds, it would not be friendship, and no heart would award it with anything from its compassion and affection.

In fact, al-Shābbī urges al-Ḥulaywī to criticize him as long as he sees that he speaks from "the sacred inspiration of Truth" (*waḥyī al-ḥaqīqah*)644 and he assures al-Ḥulaywī that he will do the same. However, such criticism ought to be delivered in such a manner that it does hurt the other party's feelings, attack their sentiments, or harm the affection that exists between them as friends.645

As in other instances, it appears that the honest and free – or, in this case, semi-free – expression of the individual and their inspired, subjective truths takes precedence over any charade of enthusiastic adoration or agreement in order to wage peace and avoid turbulence. At least, such is the case for al-Shābbī.

al-Shābbī's approach to criticism within a friendship appears to differ from that of al-Ḥulaywī, for whom criticism seems to be a potential threat to the affection that exists between them. From the above passages, one may gather that the very conscious measures that are taken by al-Ḥulaywī in order to stay within the role of the keen admirer and avoid any rift between the two is a behavior neither condoned nor reciprocated by al-Shābbī.646 Ironically, al-Ḥulaywī's unambiguous request to

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643 al-Ḥulaywī (1966: 44).
644 al-Ḥulaywī (1966: 44).
645 al-Ḥulaywī (1966: 44).
646 al-Shābbī reminds al-Ḥulaywī about his positive stance on friendship and criticism in a later letter, dated "19 December 1932." See al-Ḥulaywī (1966: 81).

al-Shābbī to let him entertain this dynamic between them indicates a withholding of thoughts and opinions and a repression of their articulation.

Moreover, in contrast to al-Ḥulaywī's position concerning criticism, al-Shābbī plans to go public with a critique[647] of al-Ḥulaywī's article *al-Shiʿr fī Tūnis*[648] ('Poetry in Tunisia') and he provides his friend with his excuses for doing do. While al-Shābbī makes sure to relate that he took the time needed to give thought to the matter before making the decision, the acknowledgement of his own critique of al-Ḥulaywī's work and – on top of that – his choice to make it available to a larger public is indicative of al-Shābbī's seemingly relaxed attitude toward criticism.

ثم اننى كتبت النقد بعد صراع مع النفس عنيف وهو ينحصر فى نقط ثلاثة:

1) حصرك وظيفه الشاعر فى تصويره لعصره ومصره.

2) جعلك لبشار شاعر فلسفة وكلام.

3) اتخاذك الشهرة مقياسا لعظمة الاديب.

والذى دفعنى الى اشراك القراء فى هذا النقد:

1) ما يفهمه الناس من أن النقد والعداء لفظتان مترادفتان.

2) سكوتك انت طيلة العام الماضى واعتزالك الادب والكتابة.[649]

Then, I wrote the critique after a violent battle with myself and it can be summated in three points:

> 1. Your restriction of the poet's function to the depiction of his own time and place.
>
> 2. Your presentation of Bashshār[650] as a poet of philosophy and theology.
>
> 3. Your assumption that fame is a measurement of the greatness of the litterateur.

Furthermore, what drove me to share this critique with the public readership is:

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[647] al-Shābbī's critique of al-Ḥulaywī's article was published in the paper *al-Zamān*, October 1932.

[648] The article was published in *al-ʿĀlam al-adabī*, 15 August 1932.

[649] al-Ḥulaywī (1966: 85).

[650] The Abbasid poet Bashshār ibn Burd (d. 783/168).

1. What people normally understand, that criticism and enmity are two words for the same thing.

2. Your silence throughout the past year and your withdrawal from literature and writing.

In these regards, the letter writers act on the two different ends of the polarities that exist in letter writing, according to Altman, which further illustrates the paradoxes that surround them.[651] While, al-Shābbī abides on the side of "the bridge" (distance breaking) and *confiance* (trust), we find al-Ḥulaywī on the opposite sides, namely with "the barrier" (distance making) and *coquetterie* (concern with appearance or conceit), in the sense of al-Ḥulaywī concealing his own genuine opinions and thoughts from al-Shābbī by putting up an ingenious front or showing off [his ardent affection]. Here, it may be useful to recall the conceptual outline of Altman that, "[i]f the winning and losing of *confiance* [trust] constitute part of the narrative content, the related oppositions *confiance / coquetterie* (or candor / dissimulation) and *amitié / amour* [friendship/love] represent the two primary types of epistolary style and relationship."[652] I would also argue that the opposition *confiance*/*coquetterie* (trust/conceit)[653] is related to, or intertwined with, the "bridge/barrier" opposition. However, how these oppositions are interrelated in the mind of the letter writer is arguably subjective.

Thus, while al-Ḥulaywī may regard conceit as a narrative measure that communicates and enforces proximity (i.e. distance breaking), al-Shābbī appears to hold the opposing view that trust, of which candor is a logical consequence – including responsibly conveyed criticism – equals proximity, in contrast to conceit, which communicates and enforces distance and superficiality. With regard to the latter sense of trust as a narrative measure to create proximity between the parties involved, it uncovers the potential power of epistolary friendships as "a sign of both advanced friendships and an instrument of spiritual conversation."[654] That is, the critical space, within the context of an epistolary friendship, may act as a venue for personal and spiritual growth.[655] Considering al-Shābbī's disapproval of a

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[651] Altman (1982: 186-188). See also § 5.1.

[652] Altman (1982: 186).

[653] To reiterate, I disagree with Altman's translation of *confiance* as 'candor'; however, it may understood as 'trust [, of which candor is a logical consequence],' which is more plausible. I also have some contentions with translating *coquetterie* as 'dissimulation' without any further explanation. In this context, I understand *coquetterie* as a concern with appearance or, more likely, conceit, in the sense of ingenious expression.

[654] Murphy (2019, 51:35-51:43).

[655] Murphy (2019, 52:56).

friendship that becomes "paralyzed by the exercise of reason and fettered by the strong arms of great talents and minds," it appears that the presence of a critical space within an epistolary friendship is essential, and, indeed, what makes such an enterprise meaningful and desirable.

The persuasiveness, and sometimes the upper hand, of al-Shābbī as a (mutual) friend of al-Ḥulaywī and al-Bashrūsh may be further illustrated by an incident that threatened the friendship between al-Shābbī and al-Ḥulaywī. When al-Shābbī, unnoticed, left the capital for Tozeur sometime during October or November in the year 1930, the correspondence between him and al-Ḥulaywī was negatively affected and issues of reciprocity and adequate engagement began to arise. The tensions between the two friends seem to last up until 10 April 1932, a period of their correspondence that is marked by one year (1931) of disengagement in which only one letter is sent by each party. After al-Shābbī broke the silence in October 1931, al-Ḥulaywī asked al-Shābbī to accept his apology and explained his silence in a response letter dated "4 November 1931." Yet, al-Shābbī first replied to al-Ḥulaywī's letter on 10 April 1932, he answered with a fiery letter, in which the news of al-Ḥulaywī's "suicide" (i.e. abandoning literature), as he puts it, aggravates him and he goes as far as to threaten to cut ties with al-Ḥulaywī if he does not change his mind. The news of al-Ḥulaywī's definite withdrawal from literature was brought up during a conversation that al-Shābbī had with al-Bashrūsh in his absence, which al-Shābbī relates primarily in the form of a reported speech that, in turn, gives the dialog a mimetic illusion:

وسألته عنك سألته كثيرا، فكان مما قال لى عنك: انك ناقم ساخط على «العالم الادبى» وانا اشاركك أيضا فى السخط عليه. فقالت[656] له: وهل هذا هو السبب فى انقطاعه عن الكتابة؟ فقال: اننى أخشى... فقلت: ماذا؟ قل... قال: اننى وجدت فى الاخ فتورا عن الادب والحديث واحسست كأنه عازم على هجرانه، وأخشى أن يكون حب «**المادة**» قد حل من قلب صديقنا محل النزعة الادبية. فشعرت كانما طعنت بسهم من نار وقلت: ماذا؟ أينتحر؟ لا ان هذا لمستحيل ـ قال: وهو يغالب المرارة التى فاض بها قلبه «نعم نعم، انه ينتحر.. قلها ولاتخف»[...][657]

I asked him [al-Bashrūsh] about you. I asked him a lot. Among the things he told me about you was that you are angry and displeased with *The Literary World*

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[656] Sic.
[657] al-Ḥulaywī (1966: 63). Bold in original.

[*al-ʿĀlam al-adabī*], and I share your disapproval of it. Thus, I said to him: "Is that the reason behind his withdrawal from writing?" "I am afraid…," he said. "What? Tell me," I said. "I noticed a tepidness in our brother in literature and when conversing and I felt as if he had made up his mind about his renunciation of it. I am afraid that the love for the material has taken the place of literary fondness in the heart of our friend." I felt as though I had been struck by an arrow of fire, and said: "What? Is he committing suicide? No, that is impossible!" "Yes, yes, he is committing suicide…Say it and fear not," he said as he fought the bitterness that his heart was overwhelmed with.

The conversation between al-Shābbī and al-Bashrūsh is interesting in its narratological arrangement. Similar to the dialogs in the form of reported speech utilized in al-Sūsī's correspondence, the above excerpt illustrates the usage of a deliberately stylized direct discourse by means of a standardized and classical form of Arabic, [*al-lughah al-ʿarabiyyah*] *al-fuṣḥá*. Again, the stylized language is used to translate a more feasible, and realistic, vernacular or mixed variety (vernacular and standardized) of Arabic. Moreover, adding to the fictionalizing effect, al-Shābbī takes on an internal focalization by the end of his retelling of the conversation that took place between him and al-Bashrūsh, that is, al-Shābbī displays an insight into al-Bashrūsh's internal reality as he speaks about the subject matter (*wa-huwa yughālibu al-marārah allatī fāḍa bi-hā qalbuh* 'as he fought the bitterness that his heart was overwhelmed with').

al-Shābbī then proceeds to his ultimatum. He begins by imploring al-Ḥulaywī not to commit "suicide," that is, to abandon the "ailing Tunisian literature" (*al-adab al-tūnisī al-marīḍ*) that is in dire need of the likes of him. al-Shābbī then concludes with a threat that he will reluctantly cut ties with al-Ḥulaywī if he does, an action that is likened to putting their friendship in the grave for good.

<div dir="rtl">

[...] ولا تذكر بعد اليوم أن لك صديقا نفته صروف الحياة الى حدود الصحراء، أجل يا صديقى يجب حينئذ أن ندفن تلك الصداقة فى قبر عميق ولا نشيعها حتى بدمعة أو قصيد.[658]

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From today, [if you abandon literature,] you will forget that you have a friend that was banished to the borders of the desert by the misfortunes of life. Certainly, my friend, we must then bury that friendship in a deep grave, and we will not bid it farewell with neither a tear nor a poem.

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[658] al-Ḥulaywī (1966: 63).

al-Shābbī continues to overtly convey his intense emotional reaction to the news delivered by al-Bashrūsh about al-Ḥulaywī until the very end of the letter.

On 13 April 1932, al-Ḥulaywī replies to al-Shābbī with a letter in which he defends and explains his choice, or lack thereof. Within this dynamic, their mutual friend al-Bashrūsh is brought into the picture again and becomes a subject of criticism and accusation. The criticism and accusation of al-Bashrūsh may be boiled down to personal motivation and superficiality. In his defense, al-Ḥulaywī questions the degree of intimacy and affinity between himself and al-Bashrūsh and presents us with a friendship lacking in any reflective depth. For this cause, al-Ḥulaywī quotes a verse of poetry by the Abbasid poet Bashshār ibn Burd (d. 783/168) that speaks of the difficulties of finding a friend who is devoid of any shortcomings or wrongdoings, and hence, why one must accept what one gets lest one proceed alone without any friend at all. Furthermore, al-Ḥulaywī accuses al-Bashrūsh of being an opportunist in the sense that he, in order to take revenge on al-Ḥulaywī, exaggerated and laid it on thick regarding his choice to abandon literature.[659]

Given the portrayed lack of intimacy and affinity between the two, al-Ḥulaywī does not think that it is surprising that he appeared as a "materialistic man" (*rajul mādī*) in his last encounter with al-Bashrūsh. Although, for al-Ḥulaywī, the "love for the life of literature exceeds any other love" ("*wa-ḥubb li-ḥayāt al-adab yafūqu kull ḥubb*"),[660] such an intimate or personal truth cannot readily be shared in a friendship of their kind. In defense of his tepidness in conversing with their mutual friend, al-Ḥulaywī expounds:

[…] ويرجع هذا الفتور فى الحديث الى أسباب منها أنه قدم للقيروان عقب فترة أتعاب جسدية وفكرية من جراء أقتبال[661] ضيوف كثيرين حلوا بالقيروان وكان علينا أن نقوم بكل ما فيه راحتهم ومسرتهم ومنها انى لم أتعرف بالاخ البشروش الا فى ذلك اليوم معرفة تامة. أما قبل ذلك فلم نكد نتقابل الا دقائق معدودة فى سوق الكتبية فى الحاضرة […] ومنها أنه كان معنا شخص ثالث لاناقة له فى الادب ولا جمل ورأيت من باب اللياقة الا أزعج هذ[662] الصديق بما يكره من الاحاديث ولا تلمنى

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[659] al-Ḥulaywī (1966: 66).
[660] al-Ḥulaywī (1966: 66).
[661] Sic.
[662] Sic.

على صداقة كهاته لا جدوى من ورائها فأنت تعلم قول بشار ‹‹اذا أنت لم تشرب

مرارا على القذى›› .[663]

> […] This tepidness for conversing has several reasons. One being that he [al-Bashrūsh] arrived to Kairouan immediately after a psychologically and mentally tiring period during which we had many visiting guests in Kairouan. We [the Kairouanites] had to accommodate the guests with everything for their own comfort and pleasure. Another reason is that I only became completely acquainted with al-Bashrūsh that day. Prior to that, we barely met at all, other than for a few minutes in the Kutbiyyah[664] market in the capital […] Also, there was a third person with us who has nothing to do with literature. I thought that it was more becoming to not to bother this friend with discussions that he hates. Do not blame me for [having] a friendship like this that has no good beyond it. You know the words of Bashshār: "If you do not accept your drink despite its impurities [, you will go thirsty]."[665]

It is quite evident how a triangular dynamics is communicated in the above examples, in the sense that a third party, consciously or unconsciously, is cast with a more or less negatively charged significance that affects how each person, favorably or unfavorably, shows up in that very same friendship. Therefore, one may read a sense of tension between the parties involved and, perhaps, even a sense of affective rivalry between them. If true, for whose affection are they competing? Although subject to interpretation, as a reader of the letters, I would deduce that it is the affection of, or proximity to, al-Shābbī that is the object of desire.

Despite the occasional tensions between al-Ḥulaywī and al-Bashrūsh, we later find them adopting a wry humorous approach to the unease that plagued them. In a letter to al-Shābbī, written from Nabeul sometime during June 1934, al-Ḥulaywī and al-Bashrūsh join forces in reaching out to their mutual friend, who is ill. They take turns – four turns in total – in addressing al-Shābbī and they comment on each other's insertions as if the other person were absent from the conversation.[666] The

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[663] al-Ḥulaywī (1966: 66).

[664] Probable colloquial pronunciation: '*kitbiyyah*' or '*kutbiyyah.*'

[665] English translation of Bashshār's verse by Sophia Vasalou and James E. Montgomery (2021: 342, fn. 2).

[666] This letter, found in al-Ḥulaywī (1966: 149-151), is included in al-Ḥulaywī and al-Shābbī's part of the letter collection, that is, it does not appear in the appendix with al-Bashrūsh's letters. Given al-Ḥulaywī's own placement of the letter and the fact that he is the one publishing it, I am regarding it as one of al-Ḥulaywī's letters (as also reflected in Tables 2 and 2.1).

wry humor, which may read as implicit criticism, is initiated by al-Ḥulaywī as he calls out the self-contradictory nature and irony of al-Bashrūsh's words.

This episode of commentary turn taking begins with al-Bashrūsh offering his and al-Ḥulaywī's help in al-Shābbī's recovery, after which he abruptly goes on to tell al-Shābbī about his repressed resentment for literature and doubts about its usefulness. Here, on an intertextual level, one may also perhaps draw reference to Jibrān's novel about frustrated love, *al-Ajniḥah al-mutakassirah* ('Broken Wings', 1912), when al-Bashrūsh writes about their hopeless state as being one with broken wings (*[…] al-ajniḥah mutakassirah*):

[...] فماذا استفدنا من الادب وبماذا أبنا من الكتب؟ الارهاق والبلاء، والتعب والعناء. [...] أنقضى هذا الشباب بين الكتب ونخضعه للعنة الدهر والحياة فلنشفق على نفوسنا ولنقنع من الدنيا بالعجز والخيبة: فما نصنع والاجنحة متكسرة؟[667]

What have we gained from literature and what did we get in return from books? Exhaustion, misfortune, fatigue, and hardship. […] Are we going to spend this youth with our noses in books and surrender it to the blows of fate [*al-dahr*] and life? Let us then feel pity for ourselves and be content in this world with weakness and failure. For what can we do while the wings are broken [*al-ajniḥah mutakassirah*]?

On a stylistic note, a literary property of this letter, and indeed typical of the letter collection as a whole, is the frequent appearance of different rhetorical figures. One particularly common figure is parallelism, of which we find several examples in the quote above, for example: *istafadnā*/*ubnā* ('[we] gained/[we] got'), *al-adab*/*al-kutub* ('literature/books'), *al-irhāq*/*al-taʿb* ('exhaustion/fatigue'), *al-balāʾ*/*al-ʿanāʾ* ('misfortune/hardship'), and *al-ʿajz*/*al-khaybah* ('weakness/failure'). Although not as apparent in the English translation, we also find a balanced arrangement of phrases in the repetition and placements of *mādhā* ('what?'), *wa-* ('and'), and the imperative particle *li-* ('let…').

Upon reading al-Bashrūsh's comment in the letter, al-Ḥulaywī sees an opportunity to seek retribution for al-Bashrūsh's previous accusations against him. Now it is al-Bashrūsh who is in danger of being estranged from the friendship and is preparing for his "suicide" by leaving literature and becoming a materialist. al-Ḥulaywī even admits that it was through his own previously unrecognized slyness (*dahāʾ*) that he managed to bring al-Bashrūsh to disclose these sentiments

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[667] al-Ḥulaywī (1966: 150).

in his commentary to the letter. Through his confession, their (former) friend, now "a stranger" (*ajnabī*), is from now on properly addressed as "Mister Muḥammad al-Bashrūsh" ("*al-sayyid Muḥammad al-Bashrūsh*"), as opposed to the more familiar addressation as friend (*al-ṣadīq*) or brother (*al-akh*).[668] al-Ḥulaywī continues his assertion to al-Shābbī and concludes it with a remark that was probably intended as either a playful or vile joke about al-Bashrūsh:

[…] ليس لنا به من علاقة الا علاقة المجالسة والحديث عن حالة الطقس واسعار البطاطس والبذنجان، ها هو قد كتب صك انتحاره بيده ويالله ما الذ هذا الانتقام […] ماذا اقول لك بعد هذا سوى انه كتب بعد ان كان يتغزل فى عجوز تبلغ والله الستين من عمرها ويدنس شعر العقاد بانشاده فيها وفى ثوبها الازرق (العجوز هى صاحبة المقهى) ما هذا؟ هل نرسل الى بلدكم النبغاء الممتلئين حياة وآمالا عظاما فتردونهم الينا ماديين يغبطون اصحاب القصور والسيارات ويتغزلون فى العجائز الدرابيس؟! اللهم لطفا ورحمة![669]

> […] We do not have any relation with him, except sitting together and talking about the weather and the prices of potatoes and eggplant. There, now he has written his suicide letter with his own hand. Oh God, how sweet this revenge is! […] What can I tell you after this other than that he wrote that after he was flirting with an old lady who, by God, was sixty years old! He polluted the poetry of al-ʿAqqād by reciting it to her and her blue garment (the old woman is the owner of the coffeehouse). What is this? Do we send to your place [our] outstanding men, who are filled with life and big dreams, only for you to send them back to us as materialists who are envious of owners of palaces and vehicles and who flirt with old, preying ladies!? God have mercy!

The choice to point out al-Bashrūsh's "disrespectful" use of al-ʿAqqād's poetry by reciting it to a "preying old lady" seems strategic on al-Ḥulaywī's part, given the favor or esteem with which al-Shābbī regards the poetry of al-ʿAqqād and the not so favorable view of it held by al-Ḥulaywī.[670] As a triangulation, the passage acts as a continuous emphasis of the recently revealed incompatibility – as it appears – between al-Ḥulaywī and al-Shābbī, as a unit of two, and al-Bashrūsh.

At this point, al-Bashrūsh decides to redirect attention to al-Ḥulaywī's opportunism by highlighting his contradictory standards. Yet, before casting their

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[668] al-Ḥulaywī (1966: 150).
[669] al-Ḥulaywī (1966: 150-151).
[670] al-Ḥulaywī (1966: 110-111).

mutual friend in unfavorable light, al-Bashrūsh does admit that he had mistaken what in fact was the peak of a litterateur's endeavor for a "suicide," which may be a sarcastic way of implying that he, too, has reached that peak of his literary endeavor by arriving at his resentment for and aversion to it:[671]

<div dir="rtl">

وياخذ على نقمتى فى الوقت الذى يشاطرنيها فى صميمه وانتقد على ان انظر الى

نصف عجوز فى الوقت الذى يؤمن فيه أن العجائز من يسرهن التغزل فى

محاسنهن ولا يزهدن فى الرجال...[672]

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> [Yet,] he reproaches my resentment while he shares it in his heart and he criticizes me for looking at a half-old woman while he believes that old women are the ones who like to listen to compliments about their beauty and do not say no to men.

To this exposure, al-Ḥulaywī curtly and bluntly writes: "The perfume vendor cannot mend that which has been destroyed by time. Nor do marginal notes and comments make amends for letters of suicide…" ("*lā yuṣliḥu al-ʿaṭṭār mā afsada al-dahr, wa-lā al-ḥawāshī wa-al-taʿālīq ṣukūk al-intiḥār*").[673]

7.2.3 Personal Mental Health and the Romantic Side of Pain and Suffering

The correspondences of al-Shābbī, al-Ḥulaywī, and al-Bashrūsh record many observations of life and the self. Such observations convey the letter writers' subjective sentiments and show how "observed" events are reproduced and transformed in the epistolary written text. As shall be seen, many of these observations of life and the self and their textual representation can also be tied to mental health and the inner states of the experiencer, and they are in many ways exemplary of the universal or common trope of the turbulent youth (*al-shabāb*).

On the topic of youth and mental health, a passage from a letter sent to al-Ḥulaywī by al-Shābbī, in which the Romantic[674] infatuation with myth

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[671] al-Ḥulaywī (1966: 151).
[672] al-Ḥulaywī (1966: 151).
[673] al-Ḥulaywī (1966: 151).
[674] A broad but, here, essential term that refers back to the literary movement of European Romanticism, whose chief emphasis, in the words of Baldick (2015: keyword: "romanticism"), "was upon freedom of individual self-expression: sincerity, spontaneity, and originality became the new standards in literature, replacing the decorous imitation of classical models favoured by 18th-century neoclassicism. Rejecting the ordered rationality

continues to reverberate, is particularly telling.[675] This passage is directly preceded by an encouragement to the two friends to be resilient in times of personal and professional difficulties, in which al-Shābbī urges them:

لنرتفع يا صديقى باجنحتنا الصغيرة فوق هاته الحيوات الحقيرة التافهة ولنحلق فى آفاق النور والحق والجمال بكل ما في ايماننا من حماس وبكل ما في شبابنا من قوة وحياة طموح.[676]

Let us rise, my friend, with our small wings over those despicable and worthless lives. Let us hover in the horizons of light [*al-nūr*], truth [*al-ḥaqq*], and beauty [*al-jamāl*] with all the enthusiasm that our faith [*īmāninā*] holds and all the strength and craving spirit that our youth [*shabābinā*] possesses.

Thus, the self-abasing passage that then follows acts as an immediate reply to al-Shābbī's vivid words of encouragement, and within it we find a reference to Greek mythology, which, again, alerts the reader of hubris:

كذلك يا صديقى أكتب حينما يهيج بقلبى روح الامل وتطغى حوالى أمواج الشباب ولكنى اذا رجعت الى نفسى وثابت الى أشباحى الكئيبة الدامية وقرت حوالى أمواج الشباب وسكنت ألسنة الحياة الهاتفة، اذ ذاك تتراخى أجنحتى وتغشانى سكرة الموت وأهوى الى لجة اليأس المظلمة هوى «ايكاروس» الى أعماق البحار. أجل يا صديقى، وان فى نفسى من مضاعفات اليأس أضعاف ما أنت فيه: فهذا الداء الذى يخايلنى كل يوم وساعة بأكفان القبر وظلام الرموس، هو وحده كاف لان يهد عزائم القدر.[677]

It is these kinds of things that I write, my friend, whenever the spirit of hope awakens in my heart and the waves of youth rage around me. However, if I resort to myself, my dejected and bloody ghosts return to me, the [raging] waves of youth settle, and the shouting mouths of life quieten, then my wings slacken and

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of the Enlightenment as mechanical, impersonal, and artificial, the Romantics turned to the emotional directness of personal experience and to the boundlessness of individual imagination and aspiration." Arabic speaking writers and poets later adopted the literary thought of the Romantics during the 19th and 20th centuries. See Hammond (2018: keyword: "romanticism").

[675] Melentinsky (1997: 24). For a short discussion about myth in relation to al-Shābbī's poetry, see Ostle (1997: 149-150).

[676] al-Ḥulaywī (1966: 99).

[677] al-Ḥulaywī (1966: 99)

the agony of death overwhelms me. I fall down into the depths of dark despair as Icarus fell down into the depths of the sea. Yes, my friend! Within me, there is several times as much aggravation of despair than [within] you. For this disease, that shades me every hour of the day with the winding sheets and darkness of the grave, is enough to repel the firm wills of fate.

One may argue that the image of Icarus' fall into the depths of the sea is used in its post-classical moralizing sense, in which the fall of Icarus represents a youth's overestimation of his own abilities.[678] However, while the passage carries within it a moralizing or didactic potential as a whole, the image of Icarus – I would argue – is probably used descriptively through the confirmed simile (*tashbīh muʾakkad*) "*ahwá* […] *hawá* […]" (lit. 'I fall […] [as the] fall [of Icarus] […]'). Rather than a moralization of a young man's overestimation of himself, the confirmed simile accentuates the similarities and comparability between the two youths, that is, al-Shābbī and Icarus. Yet, the fall of Icarus, a mythical event, is descriptive of al-Shābbī's psychological state and is not another mythical event involving our young Tunisian poet. This kind of integration of a mythical event shares a resemblance to the Romantic tradition, in which myth or mythical language expresses, and depends on, an inner state instead of, by necessity, equating knowledge about the natural or external world.[679] The poets of the Apollo group, to which al-Shābbī was affiliated through his contributions to its journal (*Apollo*), were also known for integrating mythology and fables as a means of poetic expression, according to Sabry Hafez.[680] However, exactly what this poetic expression of using mythology and fables looked like is not explained further. It may be hypothesized that the poets of Apollo, like our letter writers, drew on the psychological approach of the Romantics to myth, but how this approach manifested itself in their literary productions would have to be studied individually, and then comparatively.

On the subject of self-abasement, Muḥammad al-Bashrūsh takes it even further, to explicit resentment (*niqmah*, pl. *niqmāt*)[681] of himself and his literary abilities and production. Still, al-Bashrūsh manages to fall back into acceptance and possibly even approval of precisely that kind of resentment toward the self and what springs from it. This seems to stem from a troubling uncertainty about which professional route is most suitable for him, as well as his constant, almost

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[678] Cancik et al. (2006: keyword: "Icarus").
[679] Cohen (2010: 585).
[680] In Fleet et al. (2014: keyword: "Apollo Group").
[681] Other possible translations of *niqmah* are 'revenge,' 'vengeance,' 'spite,' and 'wrath.' See Wehr (1979: keyword: "naqama").

compulsive, doubts about whether or not the *qiṣṣah* (here, 'short story' or 'fiction') really is his call or domain.[682]

After al-Ḥulaywī had inquired of al-Bashrūsh about which of his works, *āthār*, he had sent to Egypt (to the journal *Apollo*) via al-Shābbī, al-Bashrūsh shies away from the positively charged word *āthār* (lit. 'traces'). Instead, al-Bashrūsh describes his writings as "nonsense [ʿabath] that needs to be torn to pieces or burned,"[683] and he continues to say that he ought to quit writing and leave the field of literature, since the likes of him were not created for these purposes. In response to al-Ḥulaywī, al-Bashrūsh further explains:

وتنقم على نقمتى كما كان ذلك فى رسالتك فلك ذلك. ولكن ما العمل ونقمتى راسية ثابتة متغلغلة فى نفسى متمكتنة[684] منها لا تفزعها نقماتك ولا نقمات أحد...فاعلم ذلك يا صديقى [...] وتعلم لماذا أنا لست أدرى. آه يا صديقى. لقد كرهت كل شىء منى. ويكفى أن أذكره حتى أتألم. وما يكفى نفسى أن تؤلمها الحياة بشؤونها وعقباتها حتى أزيد أنا فى ايلامها....وويح للإنسان. أما يكفيه ألمه حتى يسعى الى الألم ويخطب؟ ما تراه قد غنم؟ الأشواك يا صديقى.[685]

You are mad at my resentment, as was obvious in your letter, and which is your right. Yet, what should I do? My resentment [*niqmatī*] is firmly anchored and deeply embedded in me and [I am] seized by it. Your anger, or anyone else's anger, does not scare it [the *niqmah*] away. Know that, my friend […] Do you know why I do not know [if my writings will be published in *Apollo*], my friend? Because I hate everything that comes from me. It is enough for me to mention it to be in pain. Is it not enough for my soul that life pains it with its affairs and obstacles so that I may add to its suffering? Woe unto man! Is his pain not enough for him to further proceed toward suffering and ask for it? What do you think that he has gained? Thorns, my friend.

The above passage from al-Bashrūsh's letter is highly reminiscent of his short story *Fannān* ('Artist') (1938) that was published in *al-Mabāḥith*.[686] In contrast to his other short stories that are published in the work of Salāmah (1978), which are written in a homodiegetic narrative voice (so called "first person narrative"), the

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[682] al-Ḥulaywī (1966: 173). The letter was written around November 1933.
[683] al-Ḥulaywī (1966: 178). The letter was sent from Nefta in December 1933.
[684] Sic.
[685] al-Ḥulaywī (1966: 178).
[686] *al-Mabāḥith*, No. 1 (1938 January): p. 14. The short story is also found in Salāmah (1978: 184-188).

narrative voice in *Fannān* is heterodiegetic (so called "third person narrative"). Perhaps al-Bashrūsh chose the absent (heterodiegetic) narrator to minimize or disguise the autobiographical dimension of the story. Yet, *Fannān* contains more or less directly borrowed wordings from his letter to al-Ḥulaywī. For example, in *Fannān*, the anonymous main character is a writer who is led to resent his own literary work and literature as a whole. Furthermore, in a letter to his friend, the anonymous man poses the question about what the struggling writer has gained (won) and answers himself: "Thorns. Yes, my Friend, thorns and bitterness."[687]

After having confirmed an internalized and seemingly unshakable hate and vengeance toward himself and his literary pursuits, al-Bashrūsh takes an abrupt turn and begins to embrace his own self-resentment and view it in a different light. He reflects on whether or not *niqmah*, in fact, is the blessing of understanding (*fahm*) and grasping (*idrāk*) art (*fann*), which is a reflection that also occurs in the short story *Fannān*. In light of this question put forward by our letter writer, I would not undermine the strong, negative connotations of the word *niqmah*. In fact, *niqmah* may be regarded as an antonym to *niʿmah*, that is, 'blessing,' in the sense of it being a form of requital (*mukāfaʾah*) with punishment (*ʿuqūbah*) or denial (*inkār*).[688]

وما الدمع بضعف. انما الضعف أن نزايل طريقا سلكناها ونتحاشى آفاقا مضينا اليها. فلنمض ولنتألم ولنتطلع الى السموات ولنكيف هذا التطلع بصورة الانتاج. فلننتج ولنبك على الذي ننتج ولننقم. فكله محمود ما دامت نقمة لا يتطرق اليها اليأس ولا تقعد الهمة ولا العزم. وأريد أن تحمد لى نقمتى. فهل تحمدها؟[689]

Tears are not a sign of weakness. Rather, weakness is if we depart from the path that we have embarked upon and avoid the horizons for which we have set out. Thus, let us go farther, suffer, and aspire to the heavens and shape this endeavor into creative activity. Let us create and cry over that which we have created and be full of resentment. For all of this is commendable as long as it is a resentment [*niqmah*] over which despair does not win influence and it [i.e. *the niqmah*] does not hold back ambition and determination. I want you to commend my resentment for me. So, will you not commend it?

From the letters of al-Bashrūsh a distressed young man emerges, but he does not seem to call for much pity or sympathy as he continuously presents himself.

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[687] Salāmah (1978: 186).

[688] Refer to *Lisān al-ʿarab* (1955, keyword: "n-q-m").

[689] al-Ḥulaywī (1966: 179).

Instead, by virtue of becoming "a symbol for misery and pain" (*ramz lil-shaqāʾ wa-al-alam*),[690] al-Bashrūsh calls for an acceptance and praise of his pain and fatigue, in addition to his self-resentment. He admires the words of Alfred de Vigny (d. 1863), "*Crier, gémir, pleurer est également lâche*"[691] ('To call out, to moan, and to cry, is equally cowardice'),[692] and goes on to write:

نعم الشكاية والبكاء مزرية بالرجولية، مزرية بالانسان فلنتألم كما تريد الحياة [...]
ولنعلم أن الالم نعمة لا تجود بها السماء على كل أحد. بالالم نلج آفاقا ما كنا نلجها،
ونفهم الحياة كما يجب أن نفهمها ونحاسب نفوسنا، ماذا أفادنا الالم فاذا فى نفوسنا
قوة وصلابة واذا بنا نطرى الالم ونثنى عليه. وأطرى أنا المعنى المكدود وأتألم
وأصبر.. لست عن الصبر منثنيا أبدا.. [693]

> Indeed, complaint and crying is a detraction from manliness [*al-rujūliyyah*], a detraction of man [*al-insān*]. Thus, let us suffer as Life [*al-ḥayāh*] wants us to [...] And let us realize that pain is a blessing [*niʿmah*] that the Heavens do not bestow upon everybody. With pain we exceed the limits of horizons that we have never gone to. We come to understand Life as we should understand it and we hold ourselves accountable. What does pain give us? We suddenly find in ourselves a strength and a firmness and we suddenly begin to highly praise the pain and speak appreciatively of it. I, the tired and exhausted one, praise, suffer, and persevere. Never will I turn away from perseverance.

al-Bashrūsh is somewhat exemplary of the unstable Romantic identity, in which his authorship and masculinity becomes "a matter of anxiety, self-betrayal and weakness in the midst of apparent strength"[694] and "a wish to transcend the contrasts of mind and nature, subject and object, intellect and emotion."[695] Although being a victim, or rather a hero, of some kind of *mal du siècle* ('illness of the century') that has melancholy and dissatisfaction as its base, and the alienated subject at its core, our letter writer seems to regard his contradictory

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[690] al-Ḥulaywī (1966: 189).
[691] al-Ḥulaywī (1966: 189).
[692] From the poem *La mort du loup* ('The Death of the Wolf'). NB: The correct wording is "*Gémir, pleurer, prier est également lâche*" ('To moan, to cry, and to seek help, is equally cowardice'). Refer to de Vigny (1864: 101).
[693] al-Ḥulaywī (1966: 189).
[694] Fulford (1999: 20).
[695] France (2005: keyword: "romanticism").

beliefs, feelings, and emotions as a gateway – albeit an ill-fated or hopeless one – to finding purpose and meaning in life.[696]

For the recipient, al-Ḥulaywī also provides insights into his personal mental health struggles that are suggestive of a similar phenomenon to that of al-Bashrūsh. In the case of al-Ḥulaywī and his disclosures about his mental health, the critical dimension of the Romantic outlook and aesthetics is placed in the foreground.

In a letter written to al-Shābbī at the beginning of September 1929, al-Ḥulaywī shares three psychological phases or states (*ṭawr*, pl. *aṭwār*) that revolve around the absence of romantic love and probing existential questions. He explains that, one day, he realized that something was missing in his life that kept him from experiencing the zest of life (*ṭaʿm lil-ḥayāh*): a soul mate (*shaqīqat al-nafs*).[697] Thus, al-Ḥulaywī came to know the thirst for love (*ẓamʾah lil-ḥubb*), which constitutes the first psychological phase. This phase is followed by another one of a more contemplative and existential kind. al-Ḥulaywī explains this second phase as a state of "contemplating [the purpose of] life and sensing the awe of the universe and reflecting on its enigmas" ("*al-taʾammul fī al-ḥayāh wa-al-shuʿūr bi-rahbat al-kawn wa-al-tafkīr fī muʿḍilātih*").[698] This existentially probing phase torments him with thoughts about death, the soul, and eternal life (*al-khulūd*), which may be understood as eschatology. The first two phases and the experiences and answers gathered from them eventually bring al-Ḥulaywī to a third phase, in which he comes to believe that "there is nothing that calls for enthusiasm [*al-taḥammus*] in any matter of life, since life and its inhabitants, people and their affairs, struggles, and pains are of no avail."[699]

Thus, al-Ḥulaywī's tormenting search for meaning and purpose in life ultimately leads him down a nihilistic road, denying the human experience and life itself of any meaning or purpose. In a later letter sent to al-Shābbī, al-Ḥulaywī even goes so far as to excuse the person who commits suicide in a depressive and existentially critical state as the one he is in in the moment of penning the letter:

[...] فانى اكتب اليك الآن ونفسى منقبضة كئيبة رازحة تحت كل من السآمة لا

ادرى مصدره ولا اعرف مأتاه ولو رايتنى وهذا القلم فى يدى وكأنه غريب عنى

لشدة زهدى فى كل شىء وفتور نفسى حتى عن التفكير عن سبب هاته السوداء وانى

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[696] For more on this phenomenon within the context of European Romanticism, see France (2005: keyword: "Mal du siècle, Le.").

[697] al-Ḥulaywī (1966: 34).

[698] al-Ḥulaywī (1966: 34-35).

[699] al-Ḥulaywī (1966: 35).

لأشعر شعورا مبهما بسخافة الحياة واتساءل لماذا خلقت هاته الحشرات الآدمية
المتحركة الذاهبة الجائية الصاخبة المجلبة المتشاجرة وكم اعذر من ينتحر فى مثل
هاته الحالة النفسية.[700]

[…] I write to you in this moment, in a worried and low spirit, burdened by an
exhaustion from weariness. I do not know its source nor where it came from. If
you only saw me as this pen is in my hand. It is as if it [the pen] is alien to me,
due my great abstinence from everything and my negligence of even reflecting
about the reason behind this melancholy. I have an obscure feeling of the
absurdity of life and I ask myself why these ever moving, back and forth, loud,
shouting, and arguing human vermin were created? O, how I excuse the one who
takes his life in a state of mind like this one.

Although it would have been interesting to see a direct response from al-Shābbī to
these personal disclosures by al-Ḥulaywī, such a direct response does not occur in
these instances, due to firstly the death of al-Shābbī's father and secondly to his
own health issues that delayed his correspondence. However, in the postscript to
an earlier letter from August 1929, al-Shābbī affirms a shared experience of
existential questioning. Similar to their mutual friend al-Bashrūsh, al-Shābbī turns
out to praise and romanticize the pain that comes with their existential search for
meaning and purpose. In a celebratory manner, he exclaims: "Congratulations to
you for your spirit and your life!" for al-Ḥulaywī having entered this phase, in
which he is currently "advancing with great strides."[701]

al-Shābbī clarifies to al-Ḥulaywī that it is the phase of "irksome weariness and
boredom" (*al-saʾāmah al-mutaḍajjirah wa-al-malal*) that is the true cause of
questioning the reason behind existence. While he, like al-Ḥulaywī, used to be
deeply troubled and pained by this phase, which may be likened to an existential
crisis, al-Shābbī reassures his friend that he soon realized that this phase is
"nothing but the awakening of the soul [*yaqaẓat al-nafs*] and the alertness of the
senses [*tanabbuh al-mashāʿir*] when the incentives [*bawāʿith*] of life rouse
them."[702]

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[700] al-Ḥulaywī (1966: 135).
[701] al-Ḥulaywī (1966: 29).
[702] al-Ḥulaywī (1966: 29).

7.2.4 Censure of Time and Life: Outlooks and Modality

Indeed, the previous discussion about the portrayal of personal mental health revealed a possible darker side of the Romantic outlook, in which suffering and pain is praised and upheld as an (artistic) ideal. Such accounts may be tied to the darker and grimmer sub-themes of European and Arab Romanticism, which glamorized melancholy and physical or mental suffering or ailments.[703] Here, it is important to remember that Arab Romanticism was "derived largely from the springs of romanticism in England and France in the late 18th and early 19th centuries,"[704] two geographical areas in which we find so-called "Dark Romantics" like Lord Byron[705] and Charles Baudelaire.

Moreover, the dark themes related to the young subject that appears in our letter texts is comparable to the spirit of the cultural and literary scene in Iraq, exemplified by figures such as the contemporary writer and translator Maḥmūd Aḥmad al-Sayyid (d. 1356/1937), who called himself "the sad youth" (*al-fatá al-bāʾis*)[706].

However, with the above in mind, all three correspondences also appear to draw from a thematic tradition of censure or condemnation (*dhamm*)[707] that brings to mind the pre-Islamic poetic theme of the censure of time, *dhamm al-dahr* (or *dhamm al-zamān*), and the censure of worldy life, *dhamm al-dunyā*. While arguably being, as Li Guo dubs it, a literary "stock theme,"[708] I would be wary of the connotations of stasis and classicist mannerisms that such a designation may imply. Instead of necessarily being a static and perfunctory poetic motif that has been conserved throughout Arabic literary history, *al-dahr* entails agency (or lack

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[703] See, for example, Sontag (1977) about illness and European Romanticism and Ostle (1970: 358-359, 363; 1995) discussing the Egyptian poet ʿAbd al-Raḥmān Shukrī and sentimentalism and melancholy in Arab Romanticism.

[704] Ostle (1995: 93).

[705] In a letter written in February 1934, al-Ḥulaywī mentions enthusiastically reading a book about Lord Byron's life and work by André Maurois. I believe this work could be *Byron* (published in 1930 by Grasset). See al-Ḥulaywī (1966: 148).

[706] Baskin (2019: 139).

[707] The theme of *dhamm*, 'censure' or 'condemnation,' has been connected to various subjects in the writings of Arabic speaking writers throughout history. For example, *Kitāb dhamm al-dunyā* ('Condemnation of the World') by Ibn Abī Dunyā (d. 281/894), *Kitāb dhamm al-kalām wa-ahlih* ('The Condemnation of Kalām [speculative theology] and its Proponents') by Abū Ismāʿīl al-Anṣārī al-Harawī (d. 481/1089), *Dhamm al-hawá* ('The Censure of Love') by Ibn al-Jawzī (d. 597/1201); it is also found in the form of a poem, *Urjūzah fī dhamm al-ṣabūḥ* ('Condemnation of Wine in the Morning') by Ibn al-Muʿtazz (d. 296/908).

[708] Guo (2001: 222).

thereof) and interrelation, as also shown with respect to the correspondence of Muḥammad al-Mukhtār al-Sūsī. Thus, I would suggest that the presence of *dhamm al-dahr* is indicative of a modality, that is, the constraints, conditions, and necessities that individuals (i.e. characters) have to encounter and deal with in the story world, fictional and/or otherwise.[709]

Reconnecting to both censure (*dhamm*) of life and mythicizing discourse, we find an illustrative passage from a letter written by al-Ḥulaywī to al-Shābbī.[710] Already in the opening of the letter, al-Ḥulaywī employs a religious language that draws on a mystical or ascetic outlook on life:

> [...] وألف شكر على تلك الآية الرائعة التى توجت بها مجلة أبولو وطهرت
> بروحانيتها أدران نفوسنا التى انغمست بحكم العادة وأوضاع المجتمع فى غواية اللحم
> فلم تعد ترى فى كل غادية ورائحة الا ذلك الجمال الذى يوزن بالرطل والمتر.[711]

> [...] much obliged for that wonderful *āyah*[712] with which you crowned the journal *Apollo* and, with its spirituality, cleansed the filth of our spirits that due to habit and the conditions of society have abandoned themselves to the allurement of the flesh. Thus, you end up seeing, in every [female] walking back and forth, nothing but the kind of beauty that is measured in rotl[713] and meter.

The passage appears to contain a play on the word *āyah* (pl. *āyāt*), a word whose original meaning is 'sign' or 'token,' but that has also come to signify a verse of the Quran and divine tokens.[714] It is, thus, a word play that has both archaic and religious overtones, although, in this case, the religious or mystic significance of the word is foregrounded, given al-Ḥulaywī's elaboration on the dignity and (spiritually) healing impact of al-Shābbī's poetry in terms of it being an "*āyah*." The passage also reveals an anti-worldly sentiment of the letter writer, given the

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[709] Here, I am building on the possible world theory of Lubomír Doležel, who, in his work *Heterocosmica* (2000), discusses categories of modality in relation to story worlds and the individuals (characters) that inhabit them. Although Doložel focuses on fiction, I would argue, together with Uri Margolin (2000: 335), that the concept of modalities is applicable when thinking about story worlds of any genre, fiction and non-fiction.

[710] The letter was written from Kairouan, 24 April 1933.

[711] al-Ḥulaywī (1966: 113).

[712] Most probably a reference to al-Shābbī's poem "Prayers in the Temple of Love" (*Ṣalawāt fī haykal al-ḥubb*).

[713] I.e. *raṭl*, a unit of weight of the Mediterranean and Near East that varies depending on the location. Refer to Wehr (1979: keyword: "raṭl").

[714] Bearman et al. (2012: keyword: "āya").

negatively charged and self-conscious description of the body and its passions, and its blindness to any kind of concept of beauty other than the physical kind.

al-Ḥulaywī further deals with the abstracts "Love" (*al-ḥubb*) and "Beauty" (*al-jamāl*) in ways that place an ascetic or world-renouncing, somewhat mystical meaning in the foreground of observing life. He describes "Love" as not being connected or equivalent to sensual delights, but rather, "Love," in itself, acts as a source of inspiration (*maṣdar al-ilhām*) for the poet. In turn, al-Ḥulaywī describes "Beauty" as not being – at least properly – expressed in terms of physical or corporeal beauty (of the female). Along with this, al-Ḥulaywī describes "Love" using the wording of the title of one of al-Shābbī's poems, "Prayers in the Temple of Love" (*Ṣalawāt fī haykal al-ḥubb*).[715] Besides being illustrative of the epistolary "I"-character's sentiments toward physical and emotional life and society, it is a part of the hyperbolic and mythicizing discourse about his friend. Although the following passage illustrates all of the above and plays into the relational dynamics between the two friends, it makes it clear that al-Ḥulaywī is being reminded of something that he already knows, by intuition and/or acquirement, albeit through the medium of al-Shābbī's verse:

فذكرتنا بما نظمت أن الحب شيء غير اللذة وأن الجمال لا يعبر عنه بسواد المقل،
وتورد الخدود واستدارة السوق وبروز النهود، بل هو صلوات فى هيكل الحب
ومصدر الهام للشاعر، وهو نور قدسي ونشوة روحية وهو موسيقى رفيعة فى
سمفونية الحياة.

كل شيء موقع فيك حتى   لفتة الجيد واهتزاز النهود

وقلت لنا ذلك فى شعر سماوى ما أجدره أن يكون مزمور كل محب راكع فى
الهيكل.[716]

You have reminded us with your verse that "Love" is something other than [sensual] delight and that "Beauty" is not expressed through the darkness of the eyes, the rosiness of the cheeks, the roundness of thighs, or the fullness of breasts; rather, "Love" is prayers in the temple of love and a source of inspiration for the poet. It [Love] is a sacred light [*nūr qudsī*], a spiritual ecstasy [*nashwah rūḥiyyah*], and an exquisite music in the symphony of life.

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[715] The poem is found in al-Asmar (2013: 72-76).
[716] al-Ḥulaywī (1966: 113). Bold in original.

> *All things are found in you*[717]

> *even the side glance and the quivering of the breasts*[718]

> You have told us that in heavenly poetry that is deserving of being the psalm of every lover kneeling in the temple.

One may find it strange that writers who advocated literary innovation and shared anti-classicist sentiments would incorporate classical themes and images, indigenous and non-indigenous, in their texts. To me, this demonstrates the layers and complexity of literary expression that can never be an isolated or detached phenomenon. It also demonstrates that we are probably dealing with false dichotomies, such as tradition/modernity and the sacred/the profane; rather, such elements are intertwined and inform each other and the way that they appear in the letter texts. The letter writers exemplify that innovation and change always spring from a core or a set of rules that they knew well enough to divert from or alter in new contexts. Arguably, therefore, the appearance of apparently contradicting themes and images on a surface level illustrates informed, nuanced choices that may either provoke or inspire.

7.2.5 Stories of the Body: Illness and Physical Health

We find surprisingly few accounts about the physical body in the correspondences, even though concerns and ailments connected to physical health probably largely absorbed an extra-textual reality. That is, if one were to take the letter texts as a (problematic) representation of that reality, it was not only al-Shābbī who was afflicted by illness, but also al-Bashrūsh, and for both of them their illness ended in death at the young ages of 25 and 33 years old, respectively.

When illness is discussed in the letters, the health condition or ailment is – if at all – given a general name, and certainly not a medical name. More often than not, even the actual physical location of the ailment is not specified either. The most specific references to illness, I find, are the ones that concern al-Bashrūsh's health, for example, when al-Bashrūsh himself mentions that he suffered from "*sūʾ al-haḍm*" ('bad digestion'), which was amongst the things that hindered him from

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[717] Here, it is the feminine you (*fīki*), that is, the embodied female, the beloved, that is addressed. See al-Asmar (2013: 74).

[718] This verse is from al-Shābbī's poem "Prayers in the Temple of Love" (*Ṣalawāt fī haykal al-ḥubb*).

promptly responding to al-Ḥulaywī.[719] With regard to al-Bashrūsh, al-Shābbī also tells al-Ḥulaywī about their friend retreating to his hometown for about a fortnight of recovery, since "[…] he is feeling complete fatigue [taʿab kullī] in his body, which has exhausted him. His ailment, neurasthenia [al-ḍuʿf al-ʿaṣabī], has returned and severely tired him […]" ([…] yashʿuru bi-taʿab kullī fī badanihi arhaqahu wa-istayqaẓat ʿillatuhu [al-duʿf al-ʿaṣabī] fa-atʿabahu jiddan [...]).[720] Thus, it appears that al-Bashrūsh probably suffered from a (reoccurring) burnout or depressive or nervous exhaustion.

With regard to the ambiguities around physical health, I would not go as far as to say that we are dealing with anti-pathological or de-pathologizing narratives, in the sense that a medical condition is normalized or described in behavioral terms. The letter writers do not seem to have the immediate impulse to de-pathologize their own or others' physical health conditions,[721] but there is undeniable a great deal of ambiguity, and perhaps even mystery, around matters of physical illness.

The first account of physical illness is one that concerns the severe illness of al-Shābbī's father and we find it related very early in the correspondence between al-Shābbī and al-Ḥulaywī. The father's illness is first mentioned in the postscript of the second letter sent to al-Ḥulaywī, written at the end of July 1929. In the postscript, al-Shābbī tells al-Ḥulaywī that someone had come to him in the capital to inform him that his father had become bedridden due to his sickness and that he is angry with al-Shābbī that he has not yet visited him.[722] A more detailed description of the actual sick body and demeanor of his father is given in the third letter sent to al-Ḥulaywī, written in August 1929. Now in his family home in the presence of his father, al-Shābbī is able, as a concerned observer, to depict and interpret the materiality and sensations of the sick body of his father:

فى الصباح أجلس الى ابى الذى انهكه المرض وأضناه وأرمضه الالم واذواه وطرفى الى وجهه الشاحب العليل والى جفنه الذاهل الذى أذبله الالم وأذوته الحمى والى جسمه المتهدم الواهن وسمعى الى نفسه المتقطع وتأوهاته المتتابعة [...] ومن حين

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[719] al-Ḥulaywī (1966: 184).
[720] al-Ḥulaywī (1966: 109).
[721] Cf. Smith and Watson (2010: 142, 261).
[722] al-Ḥulaywī (1966: 21).

لآخر يرفع والدى بصره الى فلا يسترجعه الا مترعا بالدمع أو مخضلا بالعبرات...
تلك صورة مقتضبة من حياتى البائسة الدامية أرسمها اليك بقلم لا أكاد أجيد مسكه.[723]

In the morning, I sit beside my father, whom the illness has exhausted and
emaciated. The pain burns and plagues him as I glance at his ailing pale face, his
drowsy eyelids that the pain and fever has caused to wilt, and his wrecked, feeble
body. Meanwhile, I listen to his disrupted breathing and successive moaning […]
From time to time, my father looks up at me and he withdraws his eyes only when
they are filled with or wet with tears… This is a small depiction of my miserable,
bloody life, which I draw for you with a pen that I barely manage to hold.

The above excerpt is – as I have found it – the most detailed description of the
physicality and physiology of illness found in the entire letter collection. While
al-Shābbī displays an attentiveness to the physical manifestations or symptoms of
his father's illness, he also shows up as a keen observer of his own and his siblings'
reactions to the sight of their ailing father – especially those of his younger sister:[724]

فما أراه كذلك الا وتملأ صدرى الزفرات وتملأ عينى العبرات وتنطلق من قلبى
المثلوم وصدرى المكلوم أنات القهر ودعوات الرجاء الى اله الحياة والموت وباسط
النور والظلمات أن يشفى هذا الاب الواهى الطريح [...] وأظل كذلك بين لب شارد
وعقل ذاهب ونفس شقية معذبة وقلب مقسم بين هموم الحياة واحزانها الى ان يأتي
أخ لى صغير أو أخية لم تفقه بعد لغة الوجوه. فما تزال تقلب طرفها الحائر المتسائل
بين وجهى الشاحب الكئيب ووجه والدى المتعوب ثم تذهب من حيث جاءت وفى
قلبها الصغير خواطر وهواجس وآلام وأحلام الله اعلم بمعناها الغامض وبأثرها
البعيد.[725]

When I see him in that condition, my chest is nothing but filled with sighs and
my eyes brim with tears. From my damaged heart and wounded chest emanate
the wails of grief and the prayers of hope to the God of life and death, the
Extender of light and darkness, to cure this feeble and bedridden father […] I
remain that way, in a combination of a frightened heart and a wandering mind,
and a suffering, wrecked soul and a heart divided between the worries of life and
its sorrows. [This,] up until my younger brother comes to me, or my younger

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[723] al-Ḥulaywī (1966: 25-26).
[724] To the best of my knowledge, al-Shābbī did not have a sister by birth, however, here, "[my]
younger sister" (here, *ukhayyah*, diminutive of *ukht*, 'sister') could refer to a foster sister or
milk-sister (*ukht fī raḍāʿah*, 'sister through milk kinship').
[725] al-Ḥulaywī (1966: 25-26).

sister who still does not comprehend the language of faces. She darts her confused and questioning eyes between my pale, gloomy face and the tired face of my father. Then she goes back from where she came while her small heart carries thoughts, concerns, pains, and dreams, of whose meaning and long-term effect God knows best.

Both of the excerpts cited and translated immediately above have a strong feature of parallelism that in a sense agitates (works up) the theme of illness and suffering and places it in the foreground of the narrative. Again, the parallelistic features are not as apparent (if at all) in the English translation; however, we find them in the Arabic original most notably in the latter excerpt, in the form of: "*wa-tamlaʾu [ṣadrī]…wa-tamlaʾu [ʿaynī]*" ('[be] filled…[be] filled') (repetition of keyword and syntactic structure), *al-zafarāt*/*al-ʿabarāt* ('sighs/tears') (phonological and semantic correspondence), and "*[bayna] lubb shārid wa-ʿaql dhāhib*" ('a frightened [lit. 'straying'] heart and a wandering mind') (semantic correspondence), and "*wa-khawāṭir wa-hawājis wa-ālām wa-aḥlām*" ('thoughts, concerns, pains, and dreams') (phonological and semantic correspondence).

One may not be able to tell with certainty from what medical condition al-Shābbī himself suffered and ultimately died, given the ambiguity surrounding it in the letters and the seeming lack of a scholarly consensus on the matter.[726] However, it is very clear that he suffered from a cardiac condition: cardiomegaly, according to Karrū.[727] Cardiomegaly is a condition whereby an abnormal enlargement of the heart takes place, and although not a disease, it is indicative of another medical condition. An enlargement of the heart is seen in people with chronic systolic heart failure and other kinds of cardiomyopathies.[728] According to Speight, it seems that al-Shābbī, in addition to a cardiac disorder, also suffered from tuberculosis (TB) – the diseases of Romantics par excellence.[729]

While it appears that al-Shābbī had more or less always suffered from weak health,[730] it is in a letter from October 1930 that he first brings up his health issues and discusses them more elaborately within the correspondence:

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[726] Moreover, I have myself not been able to locate any kind of medical record for al-Shābbī.

[727] Karrū (1953: 28).

[728] *Medical Dictionary Online* (keyword: "cardiomegaly").

[729] Speight (1973: 180). For TB and its romanticized image of the highly sensitive and artistic person, see Sontag (1977).

[730] Speight (1973: 180).

لا تألم يا صديقى لاخيك فان قلبى هو منبع آلامى فى هذا العالم. ومن يدرى؟ لعله
سيكون منبعا لمثل هاته الآلام فى عالم آخر... ان قلبى يا صديقى هو مصدر آلام
هاته النفس التائهة المعذبة وهذا الجسد المعنى المنهوك. وما دمت احمل بين جنبى
مثل هذا القلب الكسير وما دامت هاته الحياة تهد منه ولا ترحم، فاننى أشقى أبنائها.
هاته حقيقة قد أيقنت من صحتها وآمنت بها يا صديقى فلا تحاول أن تصدنى عنها.731

> My friend, do not hurt for your brother, for my heart is the source of my pains in
> this world. Who knows? Perhaps it will also be a source of similar pains in
> another world… My heart – my friend – is the origin of this lost, tormented soul
> and this troubled, worn out body. As long as I carry within me a broken heart like
> this one, and as long as this life continues to break it with no mercy, I am one of
> life's most miserable offspring. This is a truth that I have become certain of and
> firmly believe in; thus, my friend, do not try to dissuade me from it.

The above passage illustrates al-Shābbī's metaphorical thinking about his health
issues. The heart – undeniably the main issue for al-Shābbī in terms of health – is
described as being "broken" (kasīr) and as a source (manbaʿ) and origin (or cause)
(maṣdar) of pains. Moreover, the pains that al-Shābbī refers to appear to be more
or less generalized and to encompass a broader existential pain, rather than a pain
caused by a specific medical condition. In a sense, using the words of Susan
Sontag, "the disease (so enriched with its meanings) is projected onto the
world."[732]

Hence, the narrative of illness is not devoid of a moralizing dimension. Here,
the moralization around illness conveys an idea of either (divine) judgement or a
moral strike of fate on the individual or collective body. For example, regarding
the order of his doctor to rest and abstain from any kind of labor or activity
(including reading and writing), al-Shābbī writes that the words of the doctor are
"[…] like the words of fate [the divine decree] in the perception of the weak,
crushed souls" ([…] ka-kalimāt al-qadar fī naẓar al-nufūs al-wāhinah
al-marḍūḍah).[733] Another example of the moralization of illness is found earlier in
the correspondence, in connection with the description of al-Shābbī's sick father.
In this instance, it is in the form of a prayer that we find the moralizing factor,
which takes place within the "here-and-now" moment of writing as free direct
speech. Furthermore, it is noteworthy how the moralization is quite explicitly

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731 al-Ḥulaywī (1966: 52).
732 Sontag (1977: 58).
733 al-Ḥulaywī (1966: 53).

double-ended. While speaking of the illness of his father and the personal suffering it causes as a form of divine decree and punishment, al-Shābbī also questions the fairness behind this judgement:

<div dir="rtl">

آه! رب! أشقيتنى وما أشقيت أحد من عبيدك!

رب! عذبتنى وأنا عبدك الذى لم يجدف باسمك ولا كفر بنعماك!

رب! رحماك فان عبء القدر على شديد.[734]

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> O' Lord! You have made me miserable, although I have never caused any of Your servants misery! Lord, you have tormented me, while I am a servant of Yours who has never blasphemed in Your name nor denied Your favor! Lord, have mercy! For the burden of fate [al-qadar] weighs heavy on me.

Indeed, the phraseology of these lines of despair brings to mind the famous verse by al-Maʿarrī, to which they may allude: "This [life] is my father's crime against me, though never by me against another" (*hadhā janāhu abī ʿalayya wa-mā janaytu ʿalá aḥad*).[735]

Another blow of fate, so impactful that al-Shābbī forgets about his own illness and its treatment, takes place in July 1934 when his wife unexpectedly becomes ill. Here, again, al-Shābbī seems to project the (unspecified) illness of a beloved onto himself and a perceived antagonism and fury that fate (*al-qadar*) harbors against him:

<div dir="rtl">

ولكن القدر الذى يأبى الا أن يكون لى عدوا حردا قد أبى على هاته وقدر ما لم يكن فى الحسبان فقد أصيبت زوجتى بمرض أنسانى مرضى الذى كنت افكر فى علاجه واننى الآن مهموم النفس موزع اللب مستطار الشعور مقسم القلب بين دائى القديم ونصفى السقيم.[736]

</div>

> However, Fate, which refuses to be anything other than a furious enemy to me, has denied me this and has decreed something unexpected. A disease that made me forget my own disease, which I was considering to treat, has struck my wife. I am distressed, absent-minded, and frightened, and my heart is divided between my long-standing illness and my ailing better half.

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[734] al-Ḥulaywī (1966: 26).
[735] English translation inspired by Creswell (2018: 135).
[736] al-Ḥulaywī (1966: 157).

Again, we find in the last line of the above excerpt a use of parallelism that builds up the theme of illness and suffering: This time, the parallelism comes in the form of the semantic and syntactic correspondence: "*mahmūm al-nafs muwazzaʿ al-lubb mustaṭār al-shuʿūr muqassam al-qalb*" (lit. 'distressed [spirit], absent-minded, frightened [out of one's senses], divided heart'), as well as in the form of phonological correspondence: "*dāʾī al-qadīm wa-niṣfī al-saqīm*" ('my long-standing illness and my ailing better half').

Aside from the many mentions of the heart and its physical and psychological ailments, the letters of al-Shābbī contain another important disclosure about his physical health: namely, the attacks of so-called *nawbāt* (sg. *nawbah*, or coll. *nūbah*, pl. *nūbāt*), which may be translated as 'fits' or 'paroxysms.'[737] Per definition, a *nawbah*, in the sense of 'paroxysm,' could be either a sudden worsening of physical symptoms pertaining to an illness or a severe or violent emotional outburst.[738]

It is not entirely clear from the text what these *nawbāt* that afflict al-Shābbī refer to, given the metaphorical and generalized description of them. Their description suggests that they afflict his whole being, the physical and emotional body, as opposed to a specific body part or physical organ. Thus, while not excluding the possibility of the word encompassing the meaning of an extreme increase in the physical symptoms of illness, al-Shābbī does seem to opt for or emphasize the emotional and psychological sense of the word:

[...] ثم أخذتنى النوبة وانا لها كاره فلفتنى فى مثل العاصفة الهوجاء التى لا ترحم وملأت[739] على صفو الحياة السنة الهواتف التى لاتسكت وتهادت حول قلبى الصور والأشباح والخواطر والذكر [...][740]

> Then, the fit [*al-nawbah*], which I so resent, struck me. It wrapped itself around me like the violent storm that shows no mercy. The tongues of shouting voices that never keep quiet destroyed the calm of life for me, and around my heart flocked the images, ghosts, and thoughts and memories.

Compare the above excerpt, with the following description of the *nawbah*. Here, the description is based on a wordplay with the meanings of the word *nawbah*; besides physical and/or emotional fits, the word is also used to refer to an idea of

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[737] Wehr (1979: keyword: "nwb").
[738] Wehr (1979: keyword: "nwb") and Stevenson and Lindberg (2010: keyword: "paroxysm").
[739] I.e. ملأت.
[740] al-Ḥulaywī (1966: 75).

inspiration from Greek mythology, and more specifically, "the inspiration in poetry" (*nawbat al-shiʿr*). al-Shābbī speaks of "the goddess of poetry" (*rabbat al-shiʿr*) that, in turn, correlate with the muse(s) in Greek religion and mythology; that is, the goddess(es) that inspire art, literature, dance, and other knowledge, and upon which the poet and other artists and thinkers depend.[741] Here, it is noticeable that al-Shābbī did not opt for the ancient Arabian concept of the Jinn[742] as a source of inspiration to the *shāʿir* ('poet'), the *kāhin* ('priest'), and the *ʿarrāf* ('diviner').[743] Nevertheless, here the *nawbah* is presented as a poetic inspiration that comes in the form of an emotional fit.

أما الآن، ان شئت ان تعرف ذلك، فان نوبة الشعر تمتلك على عواطفى وأفكارى
وان ربة الشعر تعزف على قيثارتها الذهبية أناشيدها بعنف هائل ترتج له أعصابى
المرهفة، ولست أدرى متى تسكن «النوبة» وتتوارى ربة الانشاد فى أفقها الغامض
البعيد.[744]

As for now – if you are interested to know – the inspiration [*nawbah*] of poetry rules over my emotions and thoughts. The goddess of poetry plays her songs on her golden lyre with an extraordinary violence that shakes my sensitive core. I do not know when this fit will subside nor when the goddess of the songs will disappear into her distant, hidden horizon.

7.2.6 The Environment and Health: Holistic Approaches to Physical and Mental Health

Similar to a Western 19th and 20th century context, the idea of there being certain types of environments that are especially suitable for the sick and their recovery is

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[741] Howatson (2011: keyword: "muses").

[742] In ancient (pre-Islamic) Arabian religion, the Jinn (*al-jinn* or *al-jānn*) refers to supernatural entities that were believed to inhabit the desert and gained a status of semi- or quasi-divinities. The notion of the Jinn, short of their semi-divine status, was acknowledged in Islamic religion and theology with various conceptions. See Bearman et al. (2012: keyword: "Djinn")

[743] NB: The definition of these three ancient Arabian figures are debatable and may, here, appear as more straightforward than the scholarly debate about them actually shows. For the purpose of simplification, I am using the English terms 'poet,' 'priest,' and 'diviner.' See Bearman et al. (2012: keyword: "Shāʿir"; "Kāhin"; "ʿArrāf").

[744] al-Ḥulaywī (1966: 105).

present in the correspondences examined here.[745] Likewise, there are certain types of environments that can be detrimental to the health of an already ailing person.[746]

In the 20th century Western context, we find that landscapes that have long been eulogized and romanticized, such as the desert and the mountains, were places believed to be good for a person suffering from tuberculosis.[747] In the context of our Tunisian letter writers, the summer heat in places like Kairouan is frowned upon, while the climate of places like Aïn Draham (ʿAyn Drāhim), in the North-West, with its mountains and greenery, is looked upon favorably.

When the health of both al-Shābbī and his wife was deteriorating, al-Ḥulaywī advised him and his wife to leave the semi-desert Djerid of Tozeur, in the south, and head to another place in the country, where not only was the climate moderate, but where he might also find the essential comforts of life, medicines, and a doctor.[748] However, while the desert climate might have a negative effect on the sick body, al-Ḥulaywī does praise its advantages with respect to mental and spiritual health. Here, the Romantic trope of original unity (of subject/mind/spirit and object/nature/cosmos), or a "one with all,"[749] is used:

> هنالك فى الصحراء ينسى المتأمل نفسه وشخصه ويتجرد من قيوده المادية ليصير
> «فكرة» هائمة فى ذلك الوجود الكبير وذرة من الذرات المكونة لهذا «الكل» الشامل،
> هنالك تحس الروح السابحة فى الملكوت الاعلى بصلة القرابة، ومتين النسب بينها
> وبين ذلك الاثير السابح فى الفضاء، وذلك النور المبثوث فى عوالم الضياء وذلك
> النجم المتألق فى اجواز السماء، وفى تلك الظلمة الطخياء والليلة القمراء والرمال
> الصفراء وفى كل شىء فى الوجود ومن الوجود.[750]

> Over there, in the desert, the contemplator forgets himself and his person. He rids himself of his material chains to become an "idea" that roams in that large existence and a tiny particle among the particles that make up this totality [*al-kull al-shāmil*]. There, the soul [*rūḥ*], floating in the Supreme Kingdom [*al-malakūt al-aʿlá*], senses the kinship and the strong relation between itself and the floating air in space, the beaming brightness in the realms of light, the star that shines in

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[745] Sontag (1977: 33).

[746] al-Ḥulaywī (1966: 186).

[747] Sontag (1977: 33).

[748] al-Ḥulaywī (1966: 159).

[749] Davis (2018: 2).

[750] al-Ḥulaywī (1966: 65).

the middle of the sky, in that intense darkness and moonlit night, the yellow sand,
and everything in and of existence [*al-wujūd*].

Additionally, we find in the above excerpt an almost poetic diction that further informs the literariness of the letter text. While certainly being a feature of phonological and syntactic parallelism, we may also find that the use of rhyme and assonance (phonological parallelism) draws to mind the style of classical rhymed prose (*sajʿ*): "*[fī] al-faḍāʾ…[fī ʿawālim] al-ḍiyāʾ…[fī ajwāz] al-samāʾ…[fī tilka] al-ṭakhyāʾ…al-qamrāʾ…al-ṣafrā'*" ('[in] space…[in the realms of] light… [in the middle of the] sky…intense…moonlit…yellow').

Moreover, the trope of primordial or existential unity draws to mind the contested, mystical expression *wiḥdat al-wujūd* ('the unity/oneness of existence/being') found in Sufism. The meaning and understanding of the expression – often (erroneously) attributed to Muḥyī al-Dīn ibn al-ʿArabī[751] (d. 638/1240) – have differed throughout time. However, *wiḥdat al-wujūd* may be understood in three significant ways that are also of relevance when examining the intertextuality of al-Ḥulaywī's text:[752]

1. in its most controversial, and perhaps most misunderstood, form: monism, in the sense of 'neither God nor other than God';

2. in its less controversial form: subjective experience, in the sense of the 'oneness of being' being mere perception or something that occurs in the mind during a state of ecstasy or consciousness. Hence, what actually takes place is *wiḥdat al-shuhūd*, 'the oneness of witnessing/appearance.'

3. in its early notion: *wujūd* (lit. 'finding') was understood by early Sufis like Abū al-Qāsim al-Qushayrī (465/1074) and Abū Naṣr al-Sarrāj (d. 378/988) in its Quranic sense, as it appears in 24:39: "but he finds [*wajada*] God." Thus, in its sense of 'finding,' it refers to a conscious state in which the finder (*al-wājid*) is only aware of God.

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[751] According to Chittick in Bearman et al. (2012: keyword: "waḥdat al-shuhūd"), we find the earliest usage of the term in the teachings of the persecuted Sufi and philosopher Ibn Sabʿīn (d. ca. 669/1270). As regards Ibn al-ʿArabī, despite common belief, he does not employ this expression as a label of a monistic theological doctrine, but rather *wujūd* signifies "finding the Real [i.e. God] in ecstasy" (via Bearman et al. [2012: keyword: "waḥdat al-shuhūd"]).

[752] These understandings of the term are based on Chittick in Bearman et al. (2012: keyword: "waḥdat al-shuhūd").

Considering the actual wordings of the above passage from al-Ḥulaywī's letter, I find that the least plausible inter-text, or perhaps inter-discourse, would be the third one (the early Quranic sense), while the more relatable one would be one of the first two notions, that is, the notions of either monism or subjective experience. The clue is found in al-Ḥulaywī's train of thought: starting from contemplating (observing), then moving to the idea of the abstraction of the self (or perhaps ego death) (*tajarrud*), and then, finally, to the soul (*rūḥ*) that freely roams in the entirety of existence, experiencing its affinity with "[…] everything in and of existence," which, other than the natural world, would also include everything metaphysical that rings true to the experiencing subject.

Again, the idea of original unity that reverberates in the above passage may also allude to the non-dualist, pantheistic mindset of both European and Arab Romantics, such as Jibrān,[753] a mindset that recognizes the divine as both transcendent and immanent in relation to the natural world and its creatures (including human beings).[754] It is also possible that al-Ḥulaywī provides a spiritual synthesis of indigenious and non-indigenous monistic and pantheistic traditions, similar to what Jibrān did in his work *The Prophet* (1923).[755]

In connection to the pantheistic outlook, it is also worth mentioning al-Shābbī's poem "Irādat al-ḥayāh" ('The Will of Life') that he wrote in the northwestern coastal town Tabarka (Ṭabarqah) in September 1933.[756] In this poem, one finds an allusion to the Mother or Earth Goddess, when the poet directs his speech to the earth and addresses it as "Mother": "The Earth answered me, when I asked: O Mother, do you hate mankind?" (*wa-qālat liya l-arḍu lammā saʾaltu: ayā ummu hal takrahīna l-bashar?*),[757] after which Mother Earth answers that she bestows her bounties upon the people of ambition (*ṭumūḥ*) and risktaking (*khaṭar*) and curses those who do not keep up with time (*lā yumāshī z-zamāna*) and live the life of stone (*ʿayshi l-ḥajar*).[758] Thus, while Mother Earth loves life and despises death, it is because of her maternal compassion for her creatures (*umūmatu qalbī r-raʾūm*, 'the motherliness of my tender heart') that she allows her soil to house the dead.[759]

In an earlier letter written in June 1932, al-Shābbī informs al-Ḥulaywī about his change of plans regarding the summer holidays, which are based on his doctor's

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[753] See article by Tanritanir (2016).
[754] Bowker (2000: keyword: "pantheism").
[755] Tanritanir (2016: 17).
[756] Cheraït (2002: 48).
[757] al-Asmar (2013: 75).
[758] al-Asmar (2013: 75).
[759] al-Asmar (2013: 75).

orders. He lets al-Ḥulaywī know that he is only able to stay with him in Béni Khalled for two days, instead of for the entire vacation, for the following reason:

ان الزيتون رغم فوائده، لا أهمية له بالنسبة الى وانما المهم لى فهو هواء الصنوبر الذى أهواه من كل قلبى أو هواء الكلتوس وأيضا فانه يؤثر لى الجهة الجبلية على الجهة المنبسطة السهلة ولذلك فقد قر قرارى على عين دراهم [...]⁷⁶⁰

> Olive trees, despite their benefits, are of no bearing to me [health wise]. Rather, what is of bearing is the air of the pine tree, which I love with all my heart, or the air of the Eucalyptus tree. Moreover, for me, he [the doctor] preferred the mountainous region to the lowlands. Therefore, I have decided on Aïn Draham [...]

Upon finally arriving Aïn Draham sometime in June or July, al-Shābbī acknowledges that he is undergoing a very slow recovery process. It seems that his initial hope in the healing properties of nature turned out to be a false one, and as a result, he finds that his mental health is negatively affected. It is also during this stay that he is afflicted with the nightmarish *nawbah*⁷⁶¹ described above.

أما المعافاة فان سيرها بطئ جدا حتى اننى وانا محوط بعوالم من جمال وسحر قد ينقبض قلبى وتضيق أمامى رقعة هذا الفضاء وتسد على السآمة والقنوط كل مذاهب المتعة والفكر والاحلام فأقتل ضجرى بالنشيد واجزى ركب الحياة المبطئ الكئيب بأنغام تلهمنى اياها الغابة المصفية لشدو الطيور.⁷⁶²

> As regards my recovery, for it is progressing very slow, [so slow that,] even as I am surrounded by worlds of beauty and enchantment, I may become downhearted and the open land before me becomes closed and straitened. The boredom and despair obstructs all forms of enjoyment, thought, and dreaming. Thus, I kill my annoyance by singing and I fill the slow, gloomy rides of life with tunes inspired by the forest, where only the singing of the birds can be heard.

al-Shābbī's disappointing experience with unspoiled nature in terms of its healing and stabilizing properties through its beauty and vitality may seem antithetical to the common Romantic sentiment of nature as a source of both physical and spiritual renewal.⁷⁶³ However, not all Romantic writers shared such an idealization

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⁷⁶⁰ al-Ḥulaywī (1966: 71).
⁷⁶¹ al-Ḥulaywī (1966: 76).
⁷⁶² al-Ḥulaywī (1966: 75).
⁷⁶³ France (2015), Clark (2011: 13-14, 16), and Löwy and Sayre (2018: 82).

or optimism regarding nature, which reveals a darker side of its conceptualization, recognizing a mysterious and intangible ominous aspect of nature.[764]

Yet, as in other instances in the correspondences, our letter writers' sentiments may turn out to be contradictory or to undergo change over time. In a later letter to al-Ḥulaywī, dated 19 December 1933, al-Shābbī seems to look fondly back on his stay in Aïn Draham. Now, al-Shābbī acknowledges a personal growth (*taṭawwur*) and spiritual transformation (*inqilāb rūḥī*) that were put into motion by the beauty of nature (*jamāl al-ṭabīʿah*).[765] Thus, the combination of nature and a reactive, ailing body and spirit appears not only to reveal truths about the self, but also, consequently, to function as a catalyst for refined artistic creativity. According to al-Shābbī his two "new" poems, "al-Ṣabāḥ al-jadīd" ('New Morning') and "Nashīd al-jabbār" ('The Song of the Giant'), reflect the personal and spiritual transformation that took place within nature.[766]

The transformation entails critical insights into his (human) personality and uncovers a newfound mindset and an emotional resilience based on derision, as opposed to a previously sustained emotional reactivity:

وانما الفرق بينى وبين نفسى الاولى انى كنت اتقبل آلام الحياة واتحسس أشواكها بنفس ضارعة وقلب دامع باك، أما الآن فاننى القاها ببسمة الساخر ونظرة الحالم المنتشى بجمال الوجود.[767]

The difference between me and my old self is that I used to endure the pains of life and experience its thorns with a frail mind and a weeping heart, but as for now, I face life with the smile of the sarcastic and the gaze of the dreamer who is intoxicated with the beauty of existence.

7.2.7 Masculine Performances and Self-Making

With regard to the psychology of the male epistolary "I"- and "You"-characters that emerges from the letter texts, we may discern a (self-)destructive, and perhaps even aggressive, emotionality. The letter writers' disclosures about their existential struggles and mental health appear to convey the moral that "the emotional man is

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[764] Clark (2011: 16).
[765] al-Ḥulaywī (1966: 132-133).
[766] al-Ḥulaywī (1966: 133). The two poems can be found in al-Asmar (2013: 15-18, 193-195).
[767] al-Ḥulaywī (1966: 132).

too good for this world,"[768] in the sense that he is either led down the path of (self-)destruction or ceases to feel or be emotional at all.[769]

Another prominent feature of the young (male) artist is his negatively charged view of marriage, which is spoken of as a "crime" (*jināyah*), and the cultural traditions and customs that pressure the individual to act dependently. In a letter written to al-Ḥulaywī in February 1934, upon the news of al-Shābbī having a second child, al-Bashrūsh writes:

[...] هل حدثك عن جلال؟ اذا كان لم يحدثك وكنت لا تعرف من هذا جلال ‹‹ فاعلم أنه له ابن جديد فى هاته الايام الاخيرة فالشابى الآن اب لعائلة. قلت له يوما ان زواجه جناية فتنهد وقال: وكيف لا يكون جناية؟ ولكن اذا علمت ما يحيط به وهو فى قريته من عادات جائرة علمت أنها جناية الوسط اكثر مما هى جناية الشابى. واذا كان للشابى ذنب فهو ضعفه واستسلامه لهذا الوسط الغبى. فبقدر ما تعهده فيه من تمرد ونزوع الى الاستقلال بقدر ما تراه منكمشا خاضعا يأبى أن يأتي أمرا يصادم ‹‹نفسية القرية›› [...][770]

[…] Has he [al-Shābbī] told you about Jalāl? If he has not told you and you do not know who this Jalāl is, then know that he is al-Shābbī's newborn son, who was born just these last days. al-Shābbī is now a family father [*ab li-ʿāʾilah*]. Once, I told him that his marriage is a crime [*jināyah*] and he sighed and said to me: "How could it not be a crime?" However, if you knew about what surrounds him, as he is in his village, in terms of oppressing customs, you would know that it is more the crime of the surroundings than it is the crime of al-Shābbī. If al-Shābbī has any fault [*dhanb*] in this matter, then it is his weakness before and submission to these dumb surroundings. For as much as you see in him rebellion and striving for independence, you also see him retractive and submissive, refusing to do something that would oppose "the village mentality" […]

The above passage is quite telling in terms of revealing a sense of lack of autonomy for the young man and the lack of freedom that he experiences in his own conduct of (private) life. Here, which may come as a surprise to some readers, the young man from the village runs the risk of being bound or limited by the oppressive or coercive customs and values found in his local community. It is not entirely clear what constitutes the crime in getting married and about what the implicit negativity

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[768] Quote translated from Swedish: "[d]en känslosamma mannen tycks vara för god för denna värld" (Hansen 2004: 8).

[769] Hansen (2004: 8).

[770] al-Ḥulaywī (1966: 185). First occurrence of single guillemet in original.

toward entering fatherhood[771] really is. However, my tentative suggestion,[772] as I interpret the letter texts as a whole, is that what is at stake is individual freedom and the young man's artistic calling, which is most likely hindered or limited by the emotional, social, and material responsibilities that come with marriage and fatherhood for young men.

Ironically, al-Bashrūsh himself, who condemned al-Shābbī for his marriage and accused him of committing a crime, also eventually gives into societal and cultural norms and marries.[773] al-Ḥulaywī is the only one out of the three friends who seems to have a positive view of marriage and fatherhood, while these two matters arguably still pertain to the mundanity of life. Upon receiving al-Bashrūsh's criticism, al-Ḥulaywī consoles al-Shābbī and provides him with his thoughts on marriage and fatherhood:

> واياك والاغترار بما ينقمه البشروش من الاقوال فى اعتبار زواجك جريمة كما
> صرح لى بذلك فى رسالته. فهل تمتد يد هذا الادب اللعين الى انتزاع كل شىء منا
> حتى سعادة الاسرة. أما تكفى التضحيات التى قدمناها فى سبيله حتى يزين لنا أن
> نضحى بهاته السعادة الصغيرة ـ وان صح ان الزواج حماقة فان الابناء سعادة لانهم
> «أنا» نا[774] العارية المجردة التى ندرس من خلالها ذاتنا المتعقدة المتخفية.[775]

> Beware of being deceived by al-Bashrūsh's resentment by considering your marriage a crime, as he put it to me in his letter. Will the hand of this damned literature extend so far as to snatch everything from us, even the happiness of [creating a] family? Are the sacrifices we have already made for its sake not enough for it to lead us to sacrifice even this small happiness? Even if it is true that marriage is silliness, children [lit. 'sons'] are a joy, because they are the naked and pure selves of us through whom we can study our own complex and disguised selves.

In construing diverse and complex masculinities within the context of Arabic literature (and beyond), it is meaningful and relevant to highlight al-Ḥulaywī's

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[771] I am using the gendered term 'fatherhood,' as opposed to 'parenthood,' given the gendered context in which the notion of parenthood is discussed, as indicated by the expression "*ab li-ʿāʾilah*" ('a family father').

[772] To my knowledge, there is no previous research on this topic of manhood and fatherhood in relation to this period and geographical area to be able to suggest anything more than an interpretation.

[773] al-Ḥulaywī (1966: 157).

[774] *anā* ('I') with possessive suffix *-nā* (first person plural) ('our'), literally 'our "I"s.'

[775] al-Ḥulaywī (1966: 141).

reasoning for viewing children (*abnāʾ*, lit. 'sons') as a source of joy or happiness (*saʿādah*). We find that an obsolete idea about the continuation of the patrilineage and the bringing forth of heirs is not the first (seemingly) spontaneous or instinctive reason for having children; rather, the reason is deeply relational on a psychological (intersubjective) on level. For al-Ḥulaywī, children allow us to learn about and scrutinize our own selves or essence (*dhāt*) through their purity and innocence of being. Thus, the child becomes a clear mirror in which he, as the father, can wholly and truthfully see his own self (*dhāt*).

Repeatedly, we find the idea of the so-called "simple life," which includes – besides marriage – academic and vocational pursuits and tasks (outside of art/literature), that ultimately constitute an unsatisfying and depressing way of leading life.[776] As mentioned earlier, devoting oneself exclusively to what they see as the simple and materialistic life and retreating from the literary enterprise is harshly labeled as "suicide" and may even lead to a separation (between friends).[777]

We may discern the idea that art (*fann*) is a spirituality and that the litterateur, the *adīb*, is actualizing a spiritual or prophetic call. As indicated earlier, the actual depth – and indeed survival – of the letter writers' friendship is dependent on their resilience in fulfilling their higher purpose as creators of art (literature). Moreover, as emphasized by al-Ḥulaywī, this call does not exist and act in isolation from society; rather it is consequential to a state of affairs. Both al-Ḥulaywī and al-Shābbī speak quite elaborately of the character, principles, and function of the *adīb*, all of which appear to be centered on the idea of progress (*taqaddum*) and elevation (*nuhūḍ*) through (the revival of) the creative mind and refined literature.[778] In the words of al-Ḥulaywī:

[...] الأديب الحق رسول والرسول يضحى بكل شىء فى سبيل رسالته ويغتفر لشعبه
كل شىء بل هو يتحدى الدهر ومعاكساته ولا يسمح لليأس أن يمتد الى روحه السامى
ونفسه اليقظى واذا يئس الاديب وقنع من حياته بالخيبة والصمت فمن هو الذى يخرج
الشعب من بؤسه ويدله على طريق التقدم والنهوض.[779]

[…] The true litterateur is a Messenger [i.e. apostle]; the Messenger sacrifices everything for the sake of his Message [*risālatihi*] and he forgives everything for his people. Rather, he defies fate [*al-dahr*] and its inclemencies and he does not

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[776] See e.g. al-Ḥulaywī (1966: 45, 48, 95, 191).
[777] al-Ḥulaywī (1966: 63).
[778] al-Ḥulaywī (1966: 94, 98-99).
[779] al-Ḥulaywī (1966: 94).

allow despair to reach his elevated soul [*rūḥ*] and woke spirit [*nafs*].[780] If the litterateur would give up all hope and content himself with disappointment and silence from life, then who will bring the people out of their misery and guide them on the path of progress and elevation?

As he often does, al-Ḥulaywī ties into religious discourse when discussing the role of the literature (*al-adab*) and the litterateur, or *adīb*, which is undeniably a prophetic and spiritual role that exceeds the confinements of the subject and its immediate surroundings and interpersonal relationships to also include the greater society. Thus, the man that is inclined to this higher call of art is ideally characterized by self-sacrifice, resilience, and an emotional sensibility that enables him to empathize with the dormant and stagnant world outside of himself and his own small faction of peers.[781]

Considering the above, it seems as if the group of three friends, among themselves, created an intimate homosocial context in which they could express – and sometimes actualize – their innermost aspirations, hopes, and concerns for their society and culture, from which they in their personal lives could not escape or truly liberate themselves from as young, radical, or critical thinkers, whether in terms of their concerns about oppressive and impeding traditions or the conservative and neo-classist forces in the stagnant field of art and literature (and wider society), or their personal existential struggles and inquiries about life and its purpose. Indeed, they managed to create a temporary "safe haven" where they openly – and, mostly, without judgement – could vent taboos (such as seemingly blasphemous art), their resentment for the status quo and societal norms, and physical and mental health, even while paradoxically – or so it seems – leaning into religious and mythical imagery when doing so.

7.2.8 Concluding Segment Two: *Rasāʾil al-Shābbī*

This second segment of the analysis placed the correspondences that took place between the friends Abū al-Qāsim al-Shābbī and Muḥammad al-Ḥulaywī and between al-Ḥulaywī and Muḥammad al-Bashrūsh at the center when investigating the letters' literary and narrative themes and properties.

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[780] Here, it is perhaps reasonable to understand *nafs* in the sense of 'mind,' while in other instances *nafs* and *rūḥ* may both be understood as 'soul.' As related in Lane (1864: keyword: "n-f-s"), they may be differentiated by "the latter is that whereby life; and the former, *that whereby there is intellect*, or *reason*." (Italics in original)

[781] Cf. al-Ḥulaywī (1966: 98).

By identifying (inducting) and examining the main themes of: the characters' dynamics, observations of life and the self, stories of the body (illness and physical health), health and environment, and masculine performances and self-making, the analysis was able to further gather and discuss the following points:

- Symmetries and asymmetries and triangulations within the representations of the letter writers' interpersonal relationships, which are easily put into motion or disrupted by each party through ardent admiration, self-abasement, or censure (of another party). One of the central observations in this regard is the utilization of a mythicizing discourse that draws on the Ancient Greek and Islamic traditions.
- Many of the observations of life and the self and their textual representation are tied to mental health and the inner states and viewpoints of the experiencing subject, which constitute an integral part of the letter texts' narrative and literary composition. Again, we find the dual presence of non-indigenous themes from the Ancient Greek and Western Romantic tradition and indigenous themes from the classical Arabic literary tradition.
- Scarce and often ambiguous accounts about the physical body, despite concerns and ailments connected to physical health probably absorbing the extra-textual reality.
- Holistic approaches to the environment and physical, mental, and spiritual health, which may be read in the light of both non-indigenous (Romanticism) and indigenous (Sufism) traditions.
- Masculine performances and self-making within an intimate homosocial context that functions as a safe and often non-judgmental space for self-expressivity, individuality, and self-actualization that may challenge the status quo (of arts and culture) and societal norms that affect the artist/*adīb* and the contemporary young man.

Based on the equally literary delivery[782] of these themes in the letters of *Rasāʾil al-Shābbī*, mainly through narrative composition (incl. dialogs), metaphor, and rhetorical figures of parallelism on several levels (phonological, syntactic, and semantic), I am prompted to conclude that they carry within them a literary genius. Furthermore, this literariness of the letter texts, and indeed the letter collection as a whole, can be explained by using stylistic and narrative analysis as well as

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[782] As also found in the analysis of *al-Illghiyyāt* in "Segment One" (§ 7.1).

intertextual tools that reveal thematic and creative recycling and appropriations of literary and discursive indigenous and non-indigenous traditions.

8. Conclusions and Discussion

The hypothesis that letters have the capacity for an aesthetic autonomy and an expression of some kind of literary genius has been tested through a text-centered, narratological and stylistic approach. The letter texts' aesthetic autonomy and literary genius may be supported by and argued for from the point of view of their "world-representative," or "world-constructive," material and the ways in which they relate to and tap into other texts (broadly understood) from indigenous and non-indigenous traditions and conventions – literary and non-literary. While I believe that the letter texts' literary genius, which refers to the embedded literary elements and qualities of the texts, can be asserted through a narratological and stylistic approach, I recognize that some challenges to the question of their autonomy need to be addressed before answering in the affirmative to that specific question.

My working definition of "aesthetic autonomy" has been the letter texts' ability to stand alone as self-contained aesthetic objects: "alone" as in "detached or decontextualized" from their extra-textual historical context and materiality. However, one may identify a second layer to this notion of aesthetic autonomy: namely, the letter texts' potential to stand alone either in their singular form or as part of a larger epistolary constellation (i.e. the correspondence[s]). Several factors would inform the answers to these questions and it does not seem to be as simple as giving an answer in either the affirmative or the negative. I would argue that it is important to acknowledge that these factors involve both the study object and the studying subject.

From a reader's perceptive, I recognize that the letter text can be appreciated and read on two (or more) levels at once, as both document and art, which is a duality that would also condition or inform the aesthetic autonomy of the letter text. As mentioned earlier in the study, I do not deny or discard the referentiality of letter texts of the non-fiction genre, which differs from the referentiality of purely fictional letters. However, this is not to be confused with the convenient and harsh distinction between fact and fiction, document and art. Again, the issue goes back to the two notions of world-imaging (representation) and world-construing (fiction), which both more and less draw on the actual world as a human frame of

reference.[783] Here, I would like to draw on the words of Doležel, who states that "[t]he universe of discourse is not restricted to the actual world but spreads over uncountable possible, nonactualized worlds."[784] I find it valid – logically and philosophically – that all discourses – regardless of genre – carry within them this world-construing potential and a loyalty that may not always lie with actuality nor with historicity.[785]

Given the study's text-centered approach to the letter texts, historicity, at least, was not an issue that this study delved into or concerned itself with substantially. Thus, in a Genettian spirit, my focus remained on the material which is directly available to me as a reader and researcher, that is, the narrative (discourse) and its story (content).[786] Here, I recall Genette's disclaimer, which also rings true to the way in which I have approached the letter texts in my analysis:

> I do not mean to suggest that the narrative content of the *Recherche* has no connection with the life of its author [Marcel Proust], but simply that this connection is not such that the latter can be used for a rigorous analysis of the former (any more than the reverse). As to the narrating that produced the narrative, the act of Marcel recounting his past life, we will be careful from this point on not to confuse it with the act of Proust writing the *Recherche du temps perdu*.[787]

In the end, I believe, it all boils down to analytical focus and perspective with respect to the subject matter, which does not necessarily mean that we need to discard the importance of another focus or perspective when dealing with this subject. In this study, I have chosen to explore what results a text-centered approach may yield when testing the hypothesis about the letter texts' literary genius and aesthetic autonomy.

Although not determinative but substantiating, one may first establish whether the letters or correspondences – as the study object – are in their published or publishable form. Existing theorization[788] about published letters already supports the idea of regarding them as editorial creations, which entails an artificial and creative – and perhaps even illusory – representation of the ur-letters. In relation

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[783] Cf. Doležel (1998: 20-21).

[784] Doležel (1998: 17).

[785] Cf. Doležel (1998: 13).

[786] NB: Genette's subject is limited to the narrative (the signifier; discourse) and does not include the story (the signified; narrative content). See Genette (1980: 27).

[787] Genette (1998: 28).

[788] Jolly and Stanley (2005) and Stanley and Dampier (2008). Also discussed in "Theoretical Framework and Method of Analysis" (§ 5) in *Part II*.

to published letters in the non-fiction genre, I would even argue that the idea of "the ur-letters" is implied by the reader, unless they have the original letters in front them, in which case they can determine the degree of formal and substantive agreement. Nevertheless, even in that case, we are still dealing with a discursive construction and subjective representation of an (presumed) extra-textual reality to which we do not have direct access as readers.

Thus, the researcher's (the studying subject's) disciplinary angle and conceptual approach to the letter is relevant for how questions about aesthetic autonomy and literary genius are answered.

This study's theoretical framework, with its anchors in epistolarity theory, narratology, and stylistics, together with a set of broad text-centered working questions, allowed for a variety of literary properties and themes to be identified: textual properties that support and illustrate the idea of the letter texts' literary genius and aesthetic autonomy.

How do the letters produce stories? And how does narrative organization, style, and vocabulary affect story making?

All of the correspondences that were sampled for this study use the tool of intertextuality in their story making. The presence of inter-texts (and inter-discourses), both indigenous and non-indigenous, is a prominent feature of this creative enterprise in all of the correspondences, regardless of whether they are found in *al-Illighiyyāt* or *Rasāʾil al-Shābbī*. While the thematic content and execution of these inter-texts may differ from one work to another, and from one correspondent to another, their utilization in the making or formation of the epistolary story is universal. Indigenous (Arab and/or Islamic) and non-indigenous (Western) inter-texts, in the form of literary and non-literary traditions and conventions, create a seemingly dissonant discourse of innovation and renewal that taps into an immanent classicist point of view. Of course, one could also formulate it the other way around: a seemingly dissonant discourse of tradition and revival that taps into an immanent innovative or anti-traditionalist point of view. However, I believe this formulation is anachronistic at face value and it de-emphasizes or escapes the important observation that innovation often springs out of a core or set of existing rules.

I also believe that it is fruitful and necessary to emphasize the shift from a reductionist point of view that regards the modern *nahḍah* phenomena as a

historically and geographically isolated scenario of "East meets West."[789] That is, in order to widen our understanding of Arabic literature from the second half of the 19th century and the early 20th century, it is important to question whether the trope of "renaissance," as in "rebirth," and other related tropes, such as progress (*taqaddum*) and elevation (*nuhūḍ*), exclusively signifies the way in which non-Western societies and their producers of culture conceived their entrance onto a historical stage of (colonial) modernity.[790] These questions leave us with much to dig in, but here I recall an observation made by Muhsin J. al-Musawi that brings a lot of nuance to the contested subject of tradition versus modernity. al-Musawi observes that modern Arab poets, such as Adūnīs, viewed tradition "as larger than the canon, and therefore, as a debatable ground that should not be confused with hegemonic discourse."[791] Thus, we also need to investigate how tradition was conceived within the context of the literary enterprise and by individual writers as reflected in their work, as became clear from the features of intertextuality in the sampled letter texts.

Arguably, a poetics of dissent and opposition, as al-Musawi speaks of it,[792] is a phenomenon of different scales that can be witnessed at other points of time in Arabic literary history. Hence, the recognition of a historical presence of self-reflective retrospection, and perhaps also prospection, which took place in light of a present state of affairs (whether personal, societal, or communal) and that gave birth to various ideas about rootedness, reform, and cultural and religious revival or awakening creates new ways of studying the *nahḍah* of modernity from a non-reductionist point of view.

Furthermore, as made clear by the integration of Greek myth by al-Ḥulaywī and al-Shābbī, the non-indigenous is not necessarily located on the innovative or contemporary side of the spectrum. In al-Sūsī's letters, however, the non-indigenous appears to be located on the contemporary side, as demonstrated by the four generic elements found in the Western tradition of diary fiction: the setting, the action, the writer, and the writing.[793]

Moreover, on a stylistic note, although perhaps not very surprisingly at this point, we find a universal feature of parallelism on several levels: phonology, lexicon, syntax, and semantics. Additionally, with regard to vocabulary (lexicon),

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[789] Hill (2015: 261, 271) and Rastegar (2013).
[790] Cf. Hill (2015: 261, 271) and Rastegar (2013).
[791] al-Musawi (2006b: 237).
[792] al-Musawi (2006b: 237, 245-246, 248).
[793] As outlined by Abbott (1985: 15-16).

al-Sūsī in particular demonstrates his conversance with an archaic/classical literary style through the deliberate use of – to a modern Arabic reader – rare and non-everday words. Thus, one may find that such rhetorical and linguistic features indeed also establish a relationship of intertextuality to a foregone literary and poetic tradition.

What kind of story worlds and characters do the letters construct? How are events and subjective sentiments reproduced and transformed in the epistolary written text?

The common – although not extensive – incorporation of dialog in the form of reported speech and, on top of that, a standardized variant of Arabic creates a deceptive illusion of mimesis and dramatic effect. The deceptiveness of such representations of speech lies in the transcription and intentional or conscious translation of "natural dialog" (that is, an assumed vernacular, real-life speech) into an unnatural, stylized dialog of everyday life, which informs the text's literariness.

Observed events – regardless of their historicity – and subjective sentiments are, as most prominently demonstrated by the letter writers in *Rasāʾil al-Shābbī*, reproduced as and transformed into mythicizing and Romantic discourses about the world and themselves as subjects and agents within that same world. Among the shared features of the sampled correspondences, from both *al-Illighiyyāt* and *Rasāʾil al-Shābbī*, is a modality based in the pre-Islamic notion of *dhamm al-dahr*, 'the censure of time/fate': a modality that determines the kinds of constraints, conditions, and necessities that the letter writers, as epistolary characters, have to encounter and deal with in the (story) world. In all cases, *dhamm al-dahr* exceeds the purpose of being a classicist "stock theme" from pre-Islamic poetry and operates the parameters of agency and interrelation between the subject and the events.

With regard to the three correspondences sampled from *al-Illighiyyāt*, I found that poetry, as a textual element, has the ability to correlate with other textual elements and carry a significance in the train of events, that is, the story. This feature is illustrated by poetry being used as speech representation and becoming part of the epistolary narrative as a recount of events.

How do such properties inform the discursive images of masculinity and homosociality?

The emotional and psychological realities of male experiences are found to be repeatedly manifested in the literary delivery of all the sampled correspondences.

Within the letter texts, the voice and image of the masculine appears dynamically and with a versatility that brings nuances to and, sometimes, challenges monolithic narratives around masculinity and cultural and racialized generalizations about it. The correspondence shows that male emotions and expressivity carry within them a subversive potential in relation to the setting in which they occur: primarily, an anti-colonial and religious reformist potential, for the correspondents in *al-Illighiyyāt*, and an anti-conservative and literary reformist potential, for the correspondents in *Rasāʾil al-Shābbī*. In both cases, homosociality, in the sense of male bonding and friendship, seems to open up an intimate space in which the male subjects can express and actualize their innermost aspirations, hopes, and concerns, often through imagery and the language of surrounding texts, genres, and discourses, both indigenous and non-indigenous, past and contemporaneous.

8.1 Suggestions for Future Research

There is still much more to be explored and developed when it comes to the literary study of Arabic letter writing. While it has not been possible to address and delve into all aspects of the subject matter within the frame of this single dissertation, I hope that this study will be able to suggest to researchers possible focuses for future research as part of my exploratory quest to introduce narrative and stylistic approaches to the published modern Arabic letter. There follow below a few suggestions for future research.

A more comprehensive and comparative literary study that deals either with both pre-modern and modern Arabic letters or with several collections of letters from a specific time period is called for –too large a project to be justifiably completed within the timeframe of a PhD.

The findings of this study that pertain to narrative and style are also potential gateways to future research about Arabic epistolarity and theorization thereof. One such example would be to look for and study different narrative levels in Arabic letter texts: extradiegetic, intradiegetic, and metadiegetic levels as well as possible cases of metalepsis.[794]

I would also encourage future research within the field of Arabic literature to contribute to the larger interdisciplinary field of men's studies by examining the image of masculinity and/or homosociality and to keep such notions ambient

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[794] I.e. the main plot (outside the story world), the event story (inside the story world), embedded narratives, and possible mergences or breaches between narrative levels (as in a character narrator of one level appearing on another, higher narrative level). See Guillemette and Lévesque (2016).

enough to encompass a plurality of masculinities and male bonding. This would make it possible to examine and demonstrate how the idea of diverse masculinities also reverberates in the literary constructs of non-Western males and masculine performances, fictional or otherwise.

Of course, in connection to gender studies and Arabic epistolarity, an arduous search for Arabic letter writing and works in the *risālah* format by female subjects, especially pre-modern specimens, is also needed in order to augment these fields of research with non-Western and female examples.

9. Summary

This study analyzes a corpus consisting of a sampling of Arabic private letters found in the two published works: *al-Illighiyyāt* (1963), by the Moroccan writer and scholar Muḥammad al-Mukhtār al-Sūsī (1900-1963), and *Rasāʾil al-Shābbī* (1966) by the Tunisian writer Muḥammad al-Ḥulaywī (1907-1978). The corpus contains 144 letters written between the years 1929 and 1945, which is a time frame that is a part of the pre-independence period of both Morocco and Tunisia. I approach this primary material using a text-centered narratological and stylistic method, through which I explore narrative, style, and themes, and which sheds light on the literary and aesthetic qualities of the letter texts. These are qualities of literariness that I call "literary genius" and "aesthetic autonomy."

In addition to the main analysis of the letter texts, to which the third part of this work is dedicated, this study presents an outline of the background of the Arabic letter with regard to its history and formal poetics, both pre-modern and modern, as well as modern theorizations of letter writing and correspondence that inform the theoretical framework of the study.

9.1 *Rasāʾil al-Shābbī* (1966) and its Letter Writers

Rasāʾil al-Shābbī ('al-Shābbī's Letters') (published 1966, Tunis) is a letter collection that consists of the correspondence that took place between Muḥammad al-Ḥulaywī and the famous Tunisian poet Abū al-Qāsim al-Shābbī (1909-1934) and the letters that he received from their mutual friend, the Tunisian writer Muḥammad al-Bashrūsh (1911-1944). Although the letters of al-Bashrūsh are found in an appendix (*mulḥaq*), I still chose to regard them as an integral part of the letter collection as an editorial and literary creation. This has mainly to do with the thematically close relationship that the letters of al-Bashrūsh exhibit vis-à-vis the correspondence of al-Ḥulaywī and al-Shābbī. Moreover, although the appendix only contains the letters of al-Bashrūsh, it is evident from the contents of his letters that he received letters of response from al-Ḥulaywī, which is another indication of the significance of this particular correspondence.

The correspondence between al-Shābbī and al-Ḥulaywī begins with a letter that was written by al-Shābbī dated "29 *muḥarram* 1348" (7 July 1929) and ends with

a letter from al-Ḥulaywī dated 19 August 1934 (8 Jumādá al-Awwal 1353). The first letter from al-Bashrūsh to al-Ḥulaywī was written sometime in February 1933 and the correspondence ends with an undated letter upon the death of al-Shābbī in October 1934. The letter collection thus comprises letters that were written and exchanged over a period of roughly five years (1929-1934).

The three young Tunisian letter writers may be described as both writers and critics of literature (prose and poetry). They belonged to the literary and philosophical faction that harbored antagonistic sentiments towards contemporaneous conservative and neo-classicist forces in the literary field and in society at large. Although not completely uprooted from a classical Arabic tradition of literature, the three letter writers were undeniably exposed to and influenced by European literary traditions, especially Romanticism and the Mahjar movement (The Immigrant Poets), with key figures such as Jibrān Khalīl Jibrān (d. 1931), and contemporary Egyptian writers, such as Aḥmad Shawqī (d. 1932) and Muḥammad Ḥusayn Haykal (d. 1956).

Their writings, in the form of essays, critical articles, poetry, and short stories, were published in prominent literary journals and papers at the time, such as *Abūllū* ('Apollo') (Egypt, est. 1932) and *al-ʿĀlam al-adabī* ('The Literary World') (Tunisia, est. March 1930). Both of these journals were part of the literary revivalist movement with which al-Ḥulaywī, al-Shābbī, and al-Bashrūsh sympathized and to which they contributed.

9.2 *al-Illighiyyāt* (1963) and its Letter Writers

al-Illighiyyāt ('Writings from Illigh') (published 1963, Casablanca) is a collection of both original and sampled writings of various kinds. Muḥammad al-Mukhtār al-Sūsī wrote and compiled *al-Illighiyyāt* during his time in exile in Illigh between the years 1937 and 1945. Besides correspondence, a reader also finds in it diary entries (*mudhakkirāt*), poetry, and accounts of literary gatherings (*majālis*). However, letters make up the largest part of *al-Illighiyyāt*, about a half of it, while memoirs constitute the second largest part of the work in terms of contents. Thus, letters and correspondence may be regarded as a substantial and important part of *al-Illighiyyāt*, a work that reflects the exilic period of the author's life. Moreover, the mere integration of his correspondence into *al-Illighiyyāt* not only argues for its documentary and historical value, but also its literary and aesthetic value.

Using a quantitatively based sampling procedure, with a minimum criterion of nine letters sent, three correspondences emerged as the largest ones in

al-Illighiyyāt, namely the correspondences that took place between al-Sūsī and his cousin Ibrāhīm ibn Aḥmad (1906-1990), his close friend Aḥmad al-Manjrah (*ca.* 1901-2001), and his former teacher Shaykh al-Ṭāhir ibn Muḥammad al-Īfrānī (1867-1955). However, this sampling also has some qualitative aspects that constitute the three types of interpersonal relationships that these correspondences represent: kinship and family relations (Ibn Aḥmad), friendship (al-Manjrah), and teacher-student relations (al-Īfrānī).

On the question of whether or not the selective sampling from *al-Illighiyyāt* affects my reading and understanding of the work, I would redirect the attention to the generic nature of *al-Illighiyyāt*. While the work was launched as a work of memoir (*mudhakkirāt*), it shares the characteristics of a literary collection (*majmūʿah adabiyyah*) and the author himself has described the work as a hodgepodge of a little about everything. This is a clear indication that the work actually lends itself to different reading strategies and does not have to be read as unidimensional piece.

The three correspondences sampled stretch over an eight-year-long period that begins in November 1937 and ends in August 1945. Concerning the background of the four Moroccan letter writers, at least three of them had an Amazigh language as their first language and came from the Sūs region in mid-southern Morocco.[795] Another common denominator is a Sufi heritage or schooling; after all, the fathers of both al-Sūsī and al-Manjrah were Sufi Shaykhs. Yet, despite his Sufi background and loyalities to that heritage, al-Sūsī eventually joined the modernist reformist movement of early Salafism (*al-salafiyyah*) that had its onset in late 19th century Egypt. It was during his religious studies in the larger cities of Marrakech, Fez, and Rabat that al-Sūsī came into contact with and adopted the Salafist creed, together with a nationalist and Muslim political activist way of thinking. After a period of conducting studies and aiding the formation of secret political societies and literary forums in these larger citites, al-Sūsī was eventually thrown into exile in the year 1937.

9.3 The Study's Hypothesis and Analytical Approach

The study's overarching hypothesis is that letters have the capacity for an aesthetic autonomy and an expression of some kind of literary genius, which are aspects of the letter texts that can be tested and supported by a text-centered, narratological

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[795] The biographical information about al-Manjrah is quite sparse; however, I have gathered that he probably came from the northern parts of Morocco (around Meknes).

and stylistic analysis. Thus, I examine the letter texts for embedded literary elements and qualities from which a literary genius can be deduced and the extent to which one can regard them as self-contained aesthetic objects can be explored.

The theoretical framework of the analysis has its main anchors in epistolarity theory, narratology, and stylistics. The essential conceptualization and approach to letter writing as a creative and literary form, and published letters as editorial (and artificial) creations, is based on already existing theory on letters and letter writing.[796] However, such previous research exclusively deals with letters in a Western context. With regard to modern Arabic letters and letter writing, this is a major lacuna that this study aims to address. I do this by exploring what the literary study of published modern Arabic letters may yield in terms of information about the literary genius and aesthetic autonomy of the sampled letter texts.

When engaging with the primary material for this cause, I have posed the following set of working questions:

- How do the letters produce stories?
- How do narrative organization, style, and vocabulary affect story making?
- What kind of story worlds and characters do the letters construct?
- How are events and subjective sentiments reproduced and transformed in the epistolary written text?
- How do such properties inform the discursive images of masculinity and homosociality?

While these working questions are quite broad and open, I believe, in retrospect, that they allowed for a variety of literary properties and themes to be identified from the letter texts. The thematics and literary properties of one set of letter texts from either *al-Illighiyyāt* or *Rasāʾil al-Shābbī* did not dictate or determine the lens with which I read and analyzed the other set of letter texts. This is also the reason why I decided to treat the text sampled from each of these two works in two different segments in the analysis. Thus, the aim of this method and framework is to allow the letter texts themselves to generate their own analytical material as freely as possible, and it is my impression that the method worked well.

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[796] For example, Altman (1982), MacArthur (1990), Jolly and Stanley (2005), and Stanley and Dampier (2008).

9.4 Summary of Main Results

This study's theoretical framework with its anchors in epistolarity theory, narratology, and stylistics, together with a set of broad working questions, allowed me to identify a variety of literary properties and themes that support and illustrate the idea of the letter texts' literary genius and aesthetic autonomy.

The findings of the sampled correspondences from each work, *al-Illighiyyāt* and *Rasāʾil al-Shābbī*, may be summarized with the following points:

- A common usage of intertextuality as tool for story making.
- A presence of inter-texts (and inter-discourses), both indigenous (Arab and/or Islamic) and non-indigenous (Western), in the form of literary and non-literary traditions and conventions.
- An incorporation of dialog in the form of reported speech in a standardized variant of Arabic, which creates a deceptive illusion of mimesis and dramatic effect.
- A modality that is based in the pre-Islamic notion of *dhamm al-dahr*, 'the censure of time/fate,' which determines the constraints, conditions, and necessities that the letter writers, as epistolary characters, have to encounter in the (story) world.
- A transformation of observed events and subjective sentiments into mythicizing and Romantic discourses about the world and the self as a subject and agent within the world (primarily in *Rasāʾil al-Shābbī*).
- Poetry, as a textual element, with the ability to correlate with other textual elements and carry a significance in the train of events, that is, the story (primarily in *al-Illighiyyat*).
- Indications of a continued literary practice of prose-poetry mixing in modern Arabic letter writing and a continuation of an earlier aesthetics of (pre-modern) prosimetric genres.
- A prevalence of rhetorical figures (e.g. parallelism and simile).
- Diverse and dynamic images of masculinity and homosociality.
- Male expressivity, emotions, and homosociality that have a subversive potential in relation to the setting in which they occur (*al-Illighiyyāt*: anti-colonial and religious reformist potential; *Rasāʾil al-Shābbī*: anti-conservative and literary reformist potential)

While the execution of the inter-texts, and their thematic content, may differ from one work to another, and from one correspondent to another, the usage of inter-texts (and inter-discourses) in the making of the epistolary story is a common denominator. The indigenous (Arab and/or Islamic) and non-indigenous (Western) inter-texts – in the form of literary and non-literary traditions and conventions – generates a seemingly dissonant discourse that is marked by innovation and renewal while, at the same time, tapping into an immanent classicism, or tradition.

Thus, in many ways, the letter texts demonstrate that innovation always springs out of a core or a set of rules that their creators were sufficiently acquainted with to divert from or alter in new contexts. Therefore, I would like to argue that the appearance of seemingly conflicting themes and images in fact illustrate informed and nuanced choices that were made to either provoke or inspire, or both. Curiously, in al-Sūsī's letters, the non-indigenous appears to be located on the contemporary side of the spectrum, while in the letters of al-Ḥulaywī and al-Shābbī, the non-indigenous appears on the traditional or classical side of it.

9.5 Future Research

The general literary study of letters and letter writing is relatively nascent and sparse. To the best of my knowledge, this study, with its text-centered narratological and stylistic approach, is the only study (to this date) that deals with the published modern Arabic letter within such a literary framework and focus, and specifically, the letters of the above presented Moroccan and Tunisian writers. Thus, there is still much more to look forward to in terms of future research on the subject matter of Arabic letters and letter writing.

A few important suggestions for future research are:

- A comprehensive and comparative literary study that deals with either both pre-modern and modern Arabic letters or several collections of letters from a specific period.
- A study of narrative levels in a sampling of Arabic letter texts.
- A theorization of modern Arabic epistolarity.
- A search for Arabic letter writing and works in the *risālah* format by female subjects (especially pre-modern) in order to provide the field of research with more non-Western and female examples.

Although not necessarily by means of letters and letter writing, I also suggest that future research within the field of Arabic literature contributes to the interdisciplinary field of men's studies by examining the image of masculinity and/or homosociality with the purpose of studying and demonstrating how the idea of diverse masculinities also appears in the literary constructs of non-Western males and masculinities, fictional or otherwise.

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