

# Brotherly Letters

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

*Mariam Dalhoumi*

*Department of Languages and Literatures*

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**Author:** Mariam Dalhoumi

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## Abstract

This dissertation deals with a corpus of published private letters from the first half of the 20th century written by male writers from Morocco and Tunisia. The overall purpose of the study is to investigate and identify the literary properties (literary genius) of the published letters and their aesthetic autonomy using a stylistic and narratological method that focuses on intertextuality and the narrative levels of the letter texts.

The study's letter corpus, which spans the period from 1929 to 1945, has been created from two works: *al-Illighiyāt* ('Writings from Illigh') (1963) by the Moroccan author Muḥammad al-Mukhtār al-Sūsī and *Rasā'il al-Shābbī* ('al-Shābbī's letter') (1966) by the Tunisian author Muḥammad al-Ḥulaywī. Modern Arabic letter writing is an insufficiently studied area in the field of Arabic literature. Thus, the study's Maghribine epistolary material, and literary approach to this material, constitute a new contribution to the field.

The analysis adopts a text-centered approach in order to evoke the letter texts' full potential and diversity of literary characteristics and themes. The analysis also applies a gender perspective that intends to contribute with nuanced and divergent images of masculinity and male homosociality to the nascent area of men's studies within the field of Arabic literature.

The study shows how the literary genius and aesthetic autonomy of the letter texts can be supported by and experienced through their world-constructive material (story worlds) and creative appropriations of indigenous and non-indigenous literary traditions and conventions. The study also presents dynamic and diverse images of masculinity and male bonding and emotionality that challenge cultural and racialized categories of masculinity and monolithic narratives about it.

**Keywords:** Arabic literature, letter writing, stylistics, narrative, masculinity, Tunisian literature, Moroccan literature, Muḥammad al-Mukhtār al-Sūsī, Muḥammad al-Ḥulaywī, tarassul, risālah

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