

The Arab-American Literature: The Pen League and The Andalusian society

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Abstract

The Arab American literature is term to denote a part of Arabic Literature which flourished in the North and South America at the hand of the Arab writers, who immigrated to the regions in the end of the nineteenth and the beginning of the twentieth century. They migrated from different parts of Middle East, mainly from Lebanon, Syria and Palestine due to political and economic crisis. Though they entered the American countries to search their living, they didn't fail to recall their own art, culture and literature, with this goal they resumed their literary activities by founding some literary societies and associations both in North and South America. The Pen League (al-Rabitah al-Qalamiyah) was the first Arab-American literary society, formed originally by Nasib Arida and Abdul Massih Haddad in 1915 or 1916, and afterwards it was re-formed in 1920 by a group of Arab writers in New York headed by Jibran Khalil Jibran. And Mikhail Nuaima was selected as the General Secretary. The league was dissolved following the death of Jibran Khalil Jibran in 1931 and Mikhail Nuaima's return to Lebanon in 1932. The main objective of this society was to preserve the Arabic language and literature in America. The pen league played a significant role in the development and promotion of Arabic literature in America.

Key Words: Arab American literature, the Pen League, the Andalusian society, Journals and Magazines

Introduction:

The Arab American literature was produced during the last part of the nineteenth and the beginning of the twentieth centuries by Arab writers who immigrated to North and South America due to the socio-political and economic conditions in various Arab nations, particularly Syria and Lebanon. Arabic literature, which dates back to the fifth century, has undergone numerous stages of growth and contributed priceless masterpieces to the canon of world literature. There is no denying that the writings of Arab Americans have a unique place. The nomination of Nobel Prize to the famous Arab American writer Mikhail Nuayma is a vivid proof of the influence of Arab American literature to the modern world literature.

As previously said, at the close of the nineteenth and beginning of the twentieth centuries, Arabic writers from the Middle East who were denied freedom in their homeland fled to the 'New World' with high aspirations. During the early years of their journey, Arab American writers found it difficult to live among people who did not understand their language or traditions. But, after a while, the migrant writers overcame their difficulties and launched their literary careers. These writers, who were well-versed in old Arabic literature, absorbed western civilization and literature from distant nations, infusing new spirit and meaning into modern Arabic literature through their works.

However, Arab American writers recognized the necessity of collaborative efforts in developing this literature, expanding its geographic scope, and rapidly attracting new readers. As a result, they banded together around the different literary clubs founded by Arab American writers. The main goal of these new societies in both North and South America was to preserve the Arabic language and literature in the New World, to bring it to a level that meets the requirements of modern world literature, and to bring innovations and create literature with new ideas.

The Pen League:

The first academic society in Arabic the Pen League (al-Rabitat-al Qalamiyya) was founded in New York in 1920 by Khalil Jibran, a well-known exponent of Arab American literature. It was the largest

Arabic literary club that produced writers who were distinguished by a new style of thinking. Mikhail Nuayma, Nasib Arida, Ilya Abu Madi, Abd al-Masih Haddad, Rashid Ayyub, and Nadrad Haddad were the founding members of society.

Al-Saih (The Traveller) journal, founded in 1912 by Abd al-Masih Haddad, became the society's press organ. This publication transmitted vital messages to the Arab world from the American continent and influenced many writers. This publication contained essays and odes written by all members of the society. After the demise of Jibran Khalil and the subsequent return of Rashid Ayyub, Nasib Arida, and Mikhail Nuayma to Lebanon in 1932, the Pen League broke apart. Jibran Khalil, a well-known Arab American writer, dramatist, and artist, inspired numerous authors, artists, and musicians. As a consequence, under George Bush's decision in 1990, the Memorial Garden of Poetry named after Jibran Khalil was set out in Washington D.C. to honor the memory of a well-known writer.

Rabitat-ul-Minerva (Minerva Society) was another literary group in North America. In 1948, Egyptian writer Ahmad Zaki Abu Shadi founded this literary club in New York. Abd al-Masih Haddad had a significant part in the formation of this society.

The Minerva Society was comparable to the literary group Apollo in Egypt, which was founded and headed by notable writers such as Ahmad Zaki Abu Shadi, Abdullah Bakri, Abd al-Qadir Ashur and Mahmud Hasan Ismayl. The Minerva Society existed for just a short-lived time. After the demise Abu Shadi's, the functioning of this organization ceased.

Arab American Arabs in South America established their public and literary activities more slowly than those in North America. This was due to the fact that the Arabs who arrived in South America were less educated, their financial position was tougher, and their activity was unorganized.

The Andalusian society:

The immigrant Arabs in South America established several organizations, but the largest was Al-Usbat-al Andalusiya (The Andalusian society), which was founded in the Brazilian city of San Paulo in January 1933. The great writer Shukrullah al-Jurr offered the concept of establishing this association, and Mishel Maaluf was elected as the first chairman. It should be noted that Shukrullah al-Jurr was impressed by Mustafa Kamal Ataturk, President of the Republic of Turkey. The name al-Usbat-al Andalusia was not a coincidence. As implied by the name, this association is associated with Andalusian literature. These Arabs' activity was disorganized and difficult.

Andalusia's literature is developed at the crossroads of East and West and combines elements of both. Andalusia was the name given to Spain by the Arabs. The arrival of Arabs in Spain in the early eighth century and the establishment of their literature and culture in a Western nation for the first time was a watershed moment in the history of Arabic literature. It had a significant influence on the formatting and future development of Arab literature. The name of the first Arab entry in Spain is related with the name of the Arab commander Tariq Ibn Ziyad.

When the Umayyad dynasty's power was challenged by the Abbasid dynasty in the year 750, one of the Umayyad princes, Abdur Rahman, escaped to Spain and restored Umayyad rule there in 757. The Umayyad caliphate ruled Spain until the beginning of the eleventh century. The final pillar of Arabs in Spain, Granada, fell in 1492, and Arab-Muslim dominance in Spain came to an end.

Thus, Arab American authors, as well as writers who relocated to Andalusia, were unable to adjust to their new surroundings, desired to travel to the East, looked to their history, and appeared to be unaware of the processes taking place around them. The fundamental topic of their work was homesickness. Despite the fact that the writers of both times were separated from their homelands for various reasons, they lived with love for their homelands and never lost hope of returning there one day. In their poetry, presented the native country theme in such lovely poetic language emphasized their desire for country, nature, and people.

Abdurrahman al-Dakhil, the caliph who founded the caliphate in Spain, was also a poet who addressed the issue of homesickness in his poetry. Despite the fact that he resided in Spain, his spirit and soul were in Syria. His sonnet to the horseman on his way to Syria is regarded as one of the embittered literary examples, conveying the desire for home:

Arab American authors, like Andalusian writers, have always felt a desire for their motherland. However, there are variances in how this notion is expressed in the poems of Andalusian and Arab American poets. As a result, this issue was conveyed more openly and fully in Arab American poetry.

Arab American literature propagated Andalusian literature so widely that many scholars believed Muvashahand zajal forms of poem were created by the representatives of Andalusian literature and had a big place in Arabic literature as well.

The famous poets and writers like Shukrullah Al-Jurr, Yusuf Ganim, Michel Maaluf, Rashid Salim Al-Khuri, Qaysar Salim Al-Khuri, Ilyas Farhad, Shafik Al-Maaluf, Nemat Qazan, Tofiq Kurban, Tofiq Zaun were the members of this society. Michel Maaluf has been the society's leader for eleven years. Rashid Salim Al-Khuri, a poet, took over as chairman after Michel Maaluf died. Shafiq Maaluf, Michel Maaluf's brother, oversaw the community when Rashid Salim Al-Khuri returned to Lebanon in 1950. The main goal of the Al-Usba Al-Andalusia society, that was founded in the Barzil by Arab migrant artists, was to propagate Arab American literature in the Middle East, and Middle Eastern literature in the New World, to ensure the liberty of migrant artists while not getting engaged in politics, to enhance Brazilian literature, to raise the level of Arabic literature in Brazil, to bring together all Arab writers, and to establish relations. The journals Al-Usba Al-Andalusia and Al-Andalus Al-Jadida (New Andalusia) played an important role in the dissemination of community concepts throughout the Middle East.

Conclusion:

From the above discussion, it is clear that immigrant authors developed their creative activities by banding together in order to maintain their original language, customs, and national ideology, as well as to be conscious of the political and cultural processes taking place in their country. Despite the challenges of living in foreign places, the fundamental objective for these writers was to immortalize their roots while remaining connected to the Arab people. The literary groups that they founded contributed to the achievement of this goal. Despite similarities between the Andalusian society and the Pen League that was founded in North America, their overall notions about classical Arab literature did not correspond. Thus, members of the Andalusian society attempted to contribute innovations to Arabic literature, whilst members of the Pen League emphasized the necessity of using the traditions of classical Arabic literature. Another distinguishing aspect is that there was a lot of poetry and less amount of prose in the works of the Andalusian society members.

Scholars interpreted the success of Arab American writers in several ways. Some attribute their success to their intimate contact with Western literature, while others attribute it to works created in a new, distinctive, and creative manner, apart from the customary. In both situations, Arab American writers built a rich heritage by introducing innovations to Arabic literature while sensitively expressing many aspects of life and culture. The societies that the migrant authors established were highly organized. Literary groups founded in both North and South America played an important role in the growth, promotion, and acknowledgement of Arab literature in the West.

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