



Novel Insights, *An International Journal of Multidisciplinary Studies*

A Peer-Reviewed Quarterly Research Journal

ISSN: 3048-6572 (Online) 3049-1991 (Print)

Impact Factor: 4.25 (IIFS), 8.2 (IJIN)

Volume-II, Issue- III, February 2026, Page No. 189- 193

Published by Uttarsuri, Sribhumi, Assam, India, 788711

Website: <http://novelinsights.in/>

DOI: 10.69655/novelinsights.vol.2.issue.03W.055



Contemporary Arabic Novels: Its Features and Principles

Dr. Imrul Hussain, *Asst. Prof, Dept. of Arabic, Nabajyoti College, Kalgachia, Assam, India*

Received: 08.02.2026; Accepted: 25.02.2026; Available online: 28.02.2026

©2026 The Author(s). Published by Uttarsuri Publication. This is an open access article under the CC BY license (<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>)

Abstract

Contemporary Arabic novels differ significantly from their modern predecessors. It highlights the lack of originality in the early Arabic novel influence of Western culture. When we talk about the novel in Arabic literature, we can certainly find it in classical Arabic literature along with various other forms of literature. The Arabic novel passed through different periods from pre-Islamic period to the Modern era. But in the pre-Islamic era, it was not known as the novel because it was not an art form. But as time passed, the concept of the novel gradually came to people's minds. Many things have been written in this form of literature. The article aims to establish the unique characteristics of contemporary Arabic novels, distinguishing them from the works of authors like Naguib Mahfouz. It also differentiates between Modern Arabic novels (early 20th century) and Contemporary Arabic novels (early 21st century) which represent distinct literary movements. It analyses the impact of Western influence on Arabic literature and examines how contemporary works diverge from the established modern Arabic novel tradition. The key themes include defining the characteristics of Modern Arabic Novels, identifying the distinguishing features of Contemporary Arabic Novels.

Keywords: Arabic, Novels, Influence, Character, Literature

Introduction:

Many scholars consider contemporary Arabic novel to be the same as modern Arabic novel. Modern novels are heavily influenced by Western culture and literature. Heikal's novel *Zainab* (1913) ignited the modern Arabic fiction.¹ Then, Naguib Mahfouz gave the most perfect concept of a modern Arabic book, presenting a beautiful blend of Egyptian locations and themes on the one hand and Western philosophy and ideas on the other. Modern Arabic novels were divided into three categories: realistic, romantic, and awareness. By the middle of the 19th century the Arabs influenced by the novel of European literature, attempted this new form in their language. It was natural that the first attempt at writing the novel would be an extension of the Maqama. Muhammad al Muwailihi (1858 - 1930) wrote 'Hadith - Isa - ibn Hisham' on the model of the maqama. Al Muwailihi tried to adapt the Maqama to the times by taking his images from the society he lived in. He used his characters and events as instruments of social reforms written in

¹ M.M.Badawi, *Modern Arabic Literature*, Page 32

lively picturesque prose with witty dialogues. Al- Muwailihi's book marks the beginning of the modern novel. The early novel writers were not entirely followed the western models. They also included sermons to improve the behaviour of the common man which later on developed into didactic novel. Then they intended to write novel. Their ownership of journals like al Hilal, al Jamia and newspapers like al Ahram enabled them to publish their novels easily. They wrote detective or romantic stories in serials to increase the circulation of their periodicals. Among the émigrés, Jurji Zaydan (1861-1924) and Farah Antun (1864-1922) attempted more serious novels than those serialized in the journals. Antun wrote didactic or philosophical novels while Zaydan wrote historical series. Zaydan emphasized that history should popularize through novels. He was inspired by Alexandre Dumas and Walter Scott to write the historical series. Zaydan wrote twenty-two novels which cover the historical span from pre-Islamic to modern times.² Among them Antun al-Saqqal, Marrash, Shukri, Salim al Bustani were most famous novelists. Muhammad Husayn Haykal (1888-1956) is the first original novelist in Egypt. His famous novel Zaynab was written in Paris in (1910-1911). It contains beautiful descriptions of the Egyptian countryside and is the first social novel based on the life and habits of Egyptians. Zaynab is written without having the pale of the traditional maqama. Its language is simple and approaching every day speech.

The first novel in modern Arabic was produced in a mature, artistic and beautiful form by Yahya al- Haqqi. He was Haykal's contemporary. Another outstanding and greatest novelist Najib Mahfuz of Egypt wrote eighteen novels in modern Arabic. His novels deal with various aspects of human life such as love, faith, death etc. His famous novel "New Cairo" presents a sketch of Egyptians life. Najib's another popular novel Midaq Alley where he indicates the social injustice of the Egypt and depicts the life styles of the urban lower classes people. With his numerous novels the Arabic novel literature has come into a matured position. Arab novel was found to embody national identity, individual judgments, and creativity in highlighting the elements of romanticism.

The article analyses the impact of Western influence on Arabic literature and examines how contemporary works diverge from the established modern Arabic novel tradition.

- Defining the characteristics of Modern Arabic Novels
- Identifying the distinguishing features of Contemporary Arabic Novels
- Analysing the influence of Western culture on Arabic literature
- Exploring the role of the "Egyptian Pocket Novels" series
- Examining the thematic and stylistic differences between the two periods

The main differences between Modern Arabic Novel and Contemporary Arabic Novel:

The Arab World had a great cultural contact with West in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Shukri Al Madi describes contemporary Arabic novel is not the same as Modern Arabic novel. Alkabir Aldadisy defines that the contemporary Arabic novel as the novels that resulted from the Arabic crisis and events occurred in the last three decades. He adds that the American Invasion of Iraq and the Arabic Spring are the major drive for the contemporary Arabic novel. On dealing with contemporary Arabic novel, it is necessary to assert the important role played by Rewayat Masreyya Lel Geb (Egyptian

² M.M.Badawi, Modern Arabic Literature, Page 56

Pocket Novels, an Egyptian-Arabic series of stories and books published in Egypt by the Modern Arab Association.

The Syrian émigrés had an edge over the Egyptians in introducing western forms into Arabic, their ownership of journals like *al-Muqtataf*, *al-Hilal* and *al-Jamia* and newspapers like *al-Ahram* and *al-Muqattam* enabled them to publish their novels easily. They wrote detective or romantic stories serially to increase the circulation of their periodicals.³

However, Egyptian Pocket Novels are typical literary works, with complete literary elements. Egyptian Pocket Novels do not share any literary elements of Modern Arabic novel because they represent the soul of Contemporary Arabic novel rather than being “modern novels.” Arabic Novel lacks the originality and particularity of Arabic-Eastern soul. Arabic novel came too late as it appeared as a reaction to the Arabic interacts with Western culture through colonialism, missions, and Western cultural impact. The main differences highlighted involve a shift in literary styles, themes and responses to historical events. While Modern Arabic novels show a blend of Western and Arabic influences. Contemporary Arabic novels often exhibit a more distinct departure from traditional forms. Novels reflect the impact of significant political and social changes in the Arab world. The main differences highlighted involve a shift in literary styles, themes, and responses to historical events.

Novel is an art that is in consonance with the plaintive condition and reality of human nature and a replica of ancient story telling art. Novel is also defined as a literary genre more compatible to accommodate the clashing components and contravening expressions and voices with fluctuating properties as well as it accentuates the rapid changes of the contemporary age.

Growth and development of Arabic Novels:

In the contemporary Arabic literature, the genre of novel stands out with its outstanding characteristics. Over very short period of time, this modern literary genre expanded the mental horizon of readers. Thanks to this genre that peaked the interest of Arab readers and extensively increased their numbers. This genre was able to outpace the Arabic poetry. Naguib Mahfouz won noble prize in literature for his outstanding novels not for his contribution to poetry, and it is enough to prove that novel dominated the poetry. Moreover, the Arabic novelists at that time excelled their counterparts in Arabic poetry, and a large number of Arabic novels were diversely translated into the various languages of world.⁴ The term “Novel” is not a controversial or confusing one to make critics debate over its connotations. Such transparency is due to the coherence and intimate connection of novel with the art of storytelling which came into existence with the birth of humanity. Novel is an art that is in consonance with the plaintive condition and reality of human nature and a replica of ancient story telling art. In short, novel is a literary genre in the form of prose that gives a descriptive account of the glimpses and dimensions of multiple characters with a definite plot, setting, and time along with certain quantity and length. Novel is also defined as a literary genre more compatible to accommodate the clashing components and contravening expressions and voices with fluctuating properties as well as it accentuates the rapid changes of the contemporary age.

³ Ismat Mahdi, *Modern Arabic literature*, page 35

⁴ editor@iaeme.com <https://iaeme.com/Home/journal/IJM> 3112

It has been more than 130 years over the emergence of first Arabic novel in the modern age. Even in Europe, the novel did not evolve and developed within the specific period, rather it ran parallelly with the growth and the changes of society. Some historians of literature hold that there is an intimate connection between the rise of novel in Europe in middle age and the works translated at that time from Arabic. The first Arabic novel emerged in the last third of 19th century. Since its beginning, the Arabic novel has been under the influence of two factors; nostalgia and the intense. The critic Mustafa Abdul Ghani is of the view that, in the Arab world, the rise of novel is connected with two factors: First factor is that the influence of Egypt and Lebanon is equal to that of west and the second factor is that the art of novel. In its rise, is closely connected with the rise and development of Arab nationalism trend, and this factor overshadows all other factors. Such condition continued to remain inherent to the Arabic novel till the intellectual development and the drastic change of social relations. Arabic novel covers diverse literary characteristics and properties of past especially the style of narration, folk stories, heroic anecdotes and historical events.

In 1914, the novel "Zainab" authored by Haikal was published. This novel is conceived a quantum leap in the development of the Arabic novel, for it accommodates all the artistic features and qualities. It was published in a time when there was an intellectual uprising among the Arabic writers who were keenly interested in writing novels and stories and translating them as well. In universities, the intellectuals had feisty debates over literary genres and diverse topics in search of new ideas to bring about change. In this period, there emerged many prominent writers like Lutfi As-Sayyid, AliAbdur Razzāq, Mansūr Fahmī, Tāhā Hussein, and Taufiq Al-Hakim.

In this period, the novel became a permanent self-reliant literary genre, for it sifted out all the thematic and linguistic loopholes, drawbacks, and ambiguities, and it became diverse in all terms. Egypt had far reached impact on the development of the Arabic novel for its diverse scope of journalism and the intellectual churning. Egyptian novels were the quintessential models for writers to follow and emulate. The Arabic novel explored new scopes and was characterized by the outshining features when Naguib Mahfouz emerged as an extraordinary writer. The contribution of Naguib Mahfouz to the development of the modern Arabic novel is unprecedented. After his early efforts to write down the novel on the history of Egypt he came to realize the flaws and pathetic conditions of social life, and he shifted his attention from historical novels to the depiction of social issues and problems in his works. He brought about the drastic changes in literary productions. He diversely extended the horizons of novel and portrayed the real social problems in highly elegant language, mesmerizing writing style, eloquent expressions, and lucid and uncomplicated dictions. His writings are mirrors to reflect the subtle details and nuances of society and the world around him. He vividly portrayed the pains and sorrows of people in his realistic novels. In a nutshell, he laid down the real foundation stones of the Arabic novel. Egyptian novels were the quintessential models for writers to follow and emulate. The Arabic novel explored new scopes and was characterized by the outshining features when Naguib Mahfouz emerged as an extraordinary writer. The contribution of Naguib Mahfouz to the development of the modern Arabic novel is unprecedented. After his early efforts to write down the novel on the history of Egypt he came to realize the flaws and pathetic conditions of social life, and he shifted his attention from historical novels to the

depiction of social issues and problems in his works. He brought about the drastic changes in literary productions. He diversely extended the horizons of novel and portrayed the real social problems in highly elegant language, mesmerizing writing style, eloquent expressions, and lucid and uncomplicated dictions. His writings are mirrors to reflect the subtle details and nuances of society and the world around him. He vividly portrayed the pains and sorrows of people in his realistic novels. In a nutshell, he laid down the real foundation stones of the Arabic novel.

Conclusion:

Through this brief study it is evident that the Arabic novel blossomed in conventional fashion, and it continued to develop since the last third of 19th century until it entered the modern phase. The prominent Arabic writers continued to opened up the new horizon and introduce the innovative features into the Arabic novel till it entered the broader scope of new realism. In the contemporary age, the Arabic novel embraces the modernistic thoughts and ideologies, portrays the ordinary people, orients the society to the right direction, raises the issues of poor and underprivileged section of the society, speaks out against the injustice and tyranny, and unmasks the sinister and deceiving agents disguised as the champions of egalitarianism, liberty, and human dignity.

References:

1. Farijat, Aadil. 2000, *Maraya al-Riwayat (Dirasat Tatbiqiyya Fi al-Fann al-Riwa'eyye)*, Damascus: Manshurat Ittihad al-Kitab al-Arab, p-9.
2. Abd'al-Gani, Mustafa. 1994, *al-Ittazah al-Qaumi Fi al-Riwayat*, al-Kuwait, al-Majlis al-Watani Lil Thaqafah wa al-Funun wa al-Aadab, p-22.
3. Al-Fakhuri, Henna. 1986, *al-Jami Fi Tarikh al-Adab al-Arabi (al-Aathr al-Hadith)*, Tehran, p- 48.
4. Idris, Suhail. 1975, *Muhadhirat Un al-Qissah Fi Lubnan*. Al-Qahirah: Ma'had al-Dirasat alArabiyyah al-Ulya, p-5.
5. Al-Fakhuri, Henna. 1986, *al-Jami Fi Tarikh al-Adab al-Arabi (al-Aathr al-Hadith)*, Tehran, p-21-35.
6. Wadi, Taha. 1994, *al-Riwayat al-Siyasiyyah*. Al-Qahirah, Dar al-Nashar Lil Jamia alMisriyyah, p-7.
7. Ahmad, M. *Indo-Arab Relations 1969*, Bombay, India. ICCR, Popular Prakashan.
8. Gutas, D. Greek. 1998, *Thought, Arabic Culture: The Graeco-Arabic Translation Movement in Baghdad and Early 'Abbasid Society (2nd-4th/8th-10th centuries)*'. New York. Routledge.
9. Hitti, P. K. 2002, *History of the Arabs*. New York, NY. Palgrave Macmillan.
10. Hourani, A. 1991, *A History of the Arab Peoples*. Cambridge, MA. Harvard University Press.
11. Wink, A. 1991, *Al-Hind. The Making of the Indo-Islamic World, Volume 1*. Leiden. E.J. Brill.
12. Allen, Roger. 1995, *The Arabic Novel. An Historical and Critical Introduction (2nd ed.)*
13. <https://www.grin.com/document/1435141#:~:text=The%20key%20themes%20include%20defining,differences%20between%20the%20two%20periods> Archived on 05/02/2026
14. <https://share.google/4xK4LSOdnvIZnN2Ve> Archived on 06/02/2026
15. <https://share.google/VjTTOHXhtfAJi7kEd> Archived on 07/02/2026
16. <https://share.google/Y3oKglqxeqIAs8hZ9> Archived on 07/02/2026