

ILIYA ABU MÂDI AS A ROMANTIC POET: AN OVER VIEW

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ABSTRACT

Iliya Abu Mâdi is one of the prolific poets of Mahjar Literature. Indeed, he faced different phases of life, which is full of hardship that led him to have a composition of imaginative poetry in various fields. His poetry on nature falls in the category of romanticism. The purpose of this paper is to analyze the romantic imagination of Abu Mâdi especially relating to natural poetry. He philosophically made a reflection in his poetry of the human life as beautiful portraiture and existence. The poet recalls that man should not rebel against the fate destined for him but accept it with grace. As romanticism goes, Iliya Abu Mâdi was nostalgic for the homeland as and when he was aloof from motherland; and in this connection, he also composed a patriotic poem. His imagination extends towards human life and its riddle endowed with philosophical enquiry and the natural expressions. In fact, his verse finds smooth and lucid in an expression of his ideas. As such, scholars are of the opinion that there is full of the portrayal of romanticism in his poetry; in which his imaginative expression is employed to the great extent.

KEYWORDS: *Arabic Poetry, Mahjar Literature, Romantic Imagination, and Poems on Nature*

INTRODUCTION

Iliya AbuMâdi was one of the famous poets of the Mahjar Literature; especially he belonged to the literary Association entitled *Al-Rabita al-Qalamiyya*. In fact, it was he who introduced important innovations to the realm of Arabic poem. He was born in the village of Al-Muhayadithah (Lebanon) in 1889 A.D; only at the age of eleven years, he had to leave school for earning and leading his life. In this connection, he went to Alexandria where he started a business as a tobacconist along with his uncle. During that period Alexandria was a seat of learning that gave an excellent chance to Iliya Abu Mâdi for his taking full of advantage thereof. Finding a least of spare time, he devoted himself to learn Arabic and it was not long before he started writing poetry. He, however, had to wait till he could give all his time to it; nonetheless he made laudable attempts during this period too, and in 1911, published his first *Dîwân* entitled *Tadhkâral-Mâdi* (Remembrances of the past) in Cairo, in 1916 A.D. Iliya Abu Mâdi went to New York, where he was attracted by the Pen Association as well as its founder member. Accordingly, he associated with them and became the main pillar of Mahjar Poetry. In the same year, Iliya Abu Mâdi began his career as a journalist. In 1918 Iliya Abu Mâdi acted as an editor of the prestigious journal named *Miratal-Gharb* which was published by Najîb Diyab. Iliya Abu Mâdi married Dorothy daughter of Najîb Diyab. In fact, he had three sons from the end of his wife Dorothy. His first son was born in 1922 A.D. who was known as Richard by name His second son was born in 1924 A.D. and his name was Edward and his third son was born in 1933 A.D, who was known as Robert. In 1920 A.D. Iliya AbuMâdi became a member of *al-Rabita al-Qalamiyya* (The Pen Association) which was founded by Jibran Khalil Jibran.

His second poetry collection entitled *Dîwân Iliya Abu Mâdi* was published in 1919 A.D. in New York. His third poetry collection entitled *Al-Jadâwil* (The Brooks) was published in 1927 A.D. in New York. From his other publications, we find *al-Khamâ'il* (Thickets), which was published in 1940 A.D. and *TibrwaTurab* (Gold dust and earth), which was published in 1960 A.D. Iliya Abu Mâdi worked actively as a journalist; and during which he edited many newspapers. In 1929 A.D. he founded his own periodical, *Al-Samîr* which was the most famous newspaper of North American Mahjar Literature.

In 1949 A.D. Iliya Abu Mâdi presented the journal of Mahjar in the UNESCO in Beirut. By that period he became a famous celebrity not only in Mahjar but all over the Arab world. This famous Mahjar poet died in 1957 A.D.

It is aware of the fact that between 1st and 2nd world wars, a new genre of Arabic literature flourished in North and South America by the Arab origin immigrant community over there. This new form of Arabic literature is known as "Mahjar Literature" or the migration literature. In the domain of Mahjar Arabic poetry, Ilya Abu Mâdi was a romantic poet and gave musical expression to Arabic poetry. In this connection, M.M. Badawi remarks that Ilya Abu Mâdi belongs to have poetic talent that bears 'moralistic compositions, strongly didactic in tone, and more concerned with the moral fiber of society and man's shortcomings than with giving expression to the poet's deep personal emotions'.⁽¹⁾

DESCRIPTION

Here it is worth mentioning that Iliya Abu Mâdi was a poet bearing moods and romanticism. His open thinking led him to the way of the poetical composition consisting of the elements of romanticism. In fact, his poetry has been termed as the beginning of modern verse. As a Mahjar poet to North America, he played a very important role in respect of the Pen Association (Al-Rabita al-Qalamiyya) and also did a lot for its all-round development.

As and when Iliya Abu Mâdi migrated to the United States in 1911, he settled at Cincinnati and worked with his brother. Again he moved to New York in 1916 and was attracted with the activities of the 'Pen Association' and became its one of the founder members. By that period, Ilya Abu Mâdi was found editing several Arabic newspapers and magazines. He worked for 10 years with the Arabic language magazine entitled *mir'a al-gharb* (Mirror of the West) and finally he became the chief editor thereof. During his journalistic life in America, he also set up a bi-weekly literary review entitled 'Al-Samir' (The Companion) in 1929; in fact, after the passage of a couple of years, he expanded it into a daily newspaper from 1936. In the literary domain, it turned into a leading newspaper of North America, and it continued up to the death of Ilya Abu Mâdi (23rd November 1957).⁽²⁾

In fact, Iliya Abu Mâdi established himself as a famous émigré poet with his lyrical outpourings. His poems were collected in five volumes; about which Salma K. Jayyusi comments that "...Abu Mâdi is one of the most interesting poets of modern Arabic, for he arrived at a high degree of modernity without ever becoming divorced from traditional roots".⁽³⁾

It is interesting to note that Iliya Abu Mâdi began his poetic career in his early twenties. In fact, his first *Dîwân* entitled *Tadhkarat-Mâdi* (Remembrance of the Past, published in 1911). Indeed this anthology consists of his strong poetic talent and bears a sharp memory and a great capacity for stringing together words and rhymes.⁽⁴⁾ Apart from this, his four other volumes are as follows:

- Dîwân Ilya Abu Mâdi published in 1919
- Al-Jadâwil (The Streams) published in 1927
- Al-Khamâ'il (The Thickets) published in 1940
- Al-Tibrwa al-Turab (Gold Dust and Earth) published in 1960

Here it is worthy of mention that the poetic creativity of Iliya Abu Mâdi reached the culminated position, and it appeared as and when his third volume of verse *al-Jadawil* (The Streams) was published and the readers thereof evaluated the anthology with laudable comments. This work was a turning point of his life and thereby his fame spread far and wide as a romantic poet in the domain of émigré literature. In fact, this Dîwân consists of his best Arabic poems. Looking at the first edition of *al-Jadawil* (The Streams) the Lebanese poet and critic Mikhail Nu'aima admitted the 'great change' in the literary life of Ilya Abu Mâdi. He portrays comment saying that: 'now he feels a definite spiritual link between himself and the author which he had not felt about the first two volumes of Abu Mâdi's work'. (5)

DISCUSSIONS

Nature of Abu Mâdi's Poetry

The poetic talent of Iliya Abu Mâdi established him to be the great poet of romanticism. Accordingly he achieved popularity through his expressive use of language, his mastery of the traditional patterns of Arabic poetry and the relevance of his ideas to contemporary Arab readers. In fact, such types of qualities were treasured in the composition of Ilya Abu Mâdi. Here an attempt has been made to show his poetic collections as follows:

- Falsafa al-Hayâh (Philosophy of Life)
- Lam Ajid Ahadan (I did not find any one)
- Al-Hajar al-Saghîr (Small Stone)
- Rîh al-Shimâl (North Wind)
- Ta'âlî (Come)
- Al-Masâ' (Evening)
- Al-Tin (The Soil)
- Al-Yatîm (The Orphan)
- Al-Talâsim (The Mystery)
- Al-Faqîr (The Poor)
- Al-Kibriya Khillaal-Shaytân (The Glory of the Devil's friendship)
- Nâr al-Qura (Fir of the Villages)
- Anta (You)

- Tilka al-Sinin (Those Years)
- Ru'yâ (ADream)
- Ru'yâ al-Thâniyah (The Second Dream)
- Al-Tairân (The Flight)
- Akhu al-Warqâ' (Brother of Warqa)
- Al-Sajîna (The Female Prisoner)
- Al-'Uyun al-Sud (The Black Eyes)
- 'Atashal-Arwâh. (Thirsty of the Souls)
- Ibtasimî "You (fem.) Smile"
- Mas.ra' Jabîn (Fatal Accident of two friends)
- Fî al-Faqr (About the Poverty)
- YâRufâqî (Oh my friends)
- Umniya al-Muhajir (Aim of the Émigré)
- Ray al-Sawâb (View of the consciousness)
- Mawkab al-Turâb (Procession of the Dust)
- Al-'Alîqa (The Burning Bush)
- BilâQalb (Without Heart)
- Tahyaal-Shâm (Salutation of Syria)
- Rihal-Radî (Wind of the Destruction)
- Al-Rajulwa al-Mara'ah (The man and woman)
- Al-Saiyyid al-Mujtaba (The Chosen leader)
- LâYadriku al-Haram al-Nujum (The Old age does not touch the stars.)
- Al-Nâsika (The female hermit)
- YâSah (Oh my friend)
- Firdausî (My Paradise)
- Mumiyât (Mummies)
- Al-Shikwa (Complain)⁽⁶⁾

Abu Mâdi as a Romantic Poet

The poet Iliya Abu Mâdi expressed the tendencies of existence and discussed the issue of existence in many of his works and writings, and one of the most revealing poetical works of the tendencies like *al-lâadrî* (i.e. mysteriously nothing to know) that trapped in his philosophy. In this connection, we find his poetry entitled *al-Talâsim*, which revealed all aspects of the existential thoughts, and the poet says as "I do not know". Here we shall provide a critical study of the aspects discussed in the content of poetic work.

The poet began his poem with the heart of a matter, which is the weakness of the hypothesis of God, as it does not answer the question of the origin of life or the emergence of man, and also reflects the lack of any philosophical evidence about the fate of life or the fate of humanity, where he says at the beginning of his poem:

I came, I do not know from where (I am), but I came

And I have seen before me a path, and I have gone out

I will keep going if you like this or reject

How did you come? How did you see my way?

I do not know!

The poet then moves on to more questions about existence and its relation to God. He draws attention to a very complex philosophical issue, the issue of choice and moderation, and a matter that was an ancient religious polemic, one of the points that weaken religious thinking. The principle of reward and punishment and the principle of governance in addition to the principle of the absolute will of God, where he says:

Am I fully free or prison in chains?

Am I the leader of myself in my life or a leading rein?

I hope I know, but...

I do not know!

One of the topics that were most popular during that period was the question of the relativity of time and the results of the theory of relativity, and what had an impact on the reintroduction of our concept of time and the impact on the question of religious awareness. The universe, and may not be the poet means this idea exactly, but it is clear that he tries to draw attention to what was popular of thinking in that period when he said:

My way, what is my way? Whether it is longer or shorter?

Shall I go up or fall down in it?

I walk along the path or the path walks

Or are both of us standing, while the period is going on?

I do not know!

From the existential philosophies, the poet moves to materialism in his poetic exposition, where the fundamental question of traditional philosophy is whether consciousness is pre-articulate or pre-conscious. It introduces the idea as follows:

Would that I knew, I am the unseen world of the faithful

Do you see me I knew I was buried in it?

And very soon I shall appear and I will

Be or do you see me I knew you something?

I do not know!

Abu Mâdi went to the systems of poetry in the national and political issues, did not escape the pursuit of authorities, had to immigrate to America in 1912, where he first settled in the city, "Cincinnati" Ohio, where he lived for four years working with trade with his elder brother Murad, New York and Brooklyn, and co-founded the Pen Association of the United States of America with Gibran Khalil Gibran and Michael Nu'aima. ⁽⁷⁾

Critical Views on Iliya Abu Mâdi

Here it is worth mentioning that Ilya Abu Mâdi followed the poetical style of his predecessor and it must keep in mind about his journey of his poetical composition. As such, his debut of his poetical caliber and style started with the form of qasîda(ode) with the design of distinct bayt (couplet) and their subject matters as well. In fact, his poetical caliber developed as and when he departed to the émigré countries and was associated with the Pen Association, where he adopted a new type of pure style that belonged to the romantic spirit of poet with romantic thought and paid attention to the humanity and had a touch of its spiritual and emotional dimensions.

Gibran Khalil Gibran belonged to émigré writer, poet, and artist praised the romantic poet Ilya Abu Mâdi in the introduction of the second volume of 'Dîwân Ilya Abu Mâdi that Ilya Abu Mâdi had a great power of the imagination in the composition of romantic poetry. In fact, the imaginative power of Ilya Abu Mâdi made him a great poet as regards his caliber in poetic expression, for which he could express his attitudes, feelings, and ideas in terms of images and absolute situations.

He was keeping optimistic and realistic philosophy to the great extent and was reflected by Gibran Khalil Gibran who moved away with his thought and his beautiful world in particular. This philosophy was based on optimism and reacted with life. In fact, the poet Ilya Abu Mâdi embodied ideas for composing beautiful poems with romantic imagination to draw a social realistic life; with a form of calling for pleasure and contemplation. In this connection, the historian and writer Hanna Fâkhrî says:

"Thus, life in the eyes of Iliya Abu Mâdi is an opportunity for the presence of the human being to take advantage of it open to its beauty and enjoy the grace it offers, and the pleasure it provides."

The Poet Iliya Abu Mâdi says in his poetic version as follows:

Life is a poem of our ages, and death in it is a rhyme.

Enjoy your senses in the stars and their improvement, so, they will go on and the planets will remain.

In such a way, the poet Iliya Abu Mâdi composed poems exploiting the issues of pure social reality. In fact, he dealt with the hearts and emotions of people and could successfully infiltrate his message into the core of people's heart; so the hearts of people were naturally touched by his versification and people's hopes were raised to the level mark; as if people were given to sip thorny emotion by his flowery hope and optimism. Here we find the testimony thereof in the verses like the poem entitled Ibtasim means "Smile" and it truly expresses the philosophy of the poet's life and his insight regarding the existence finds as follows:

Your feeling of love is awakening in slumber if the feeling of people were not like puppets.

Your life is not going on other than you are making a picture of it; you are life and an eyelid as regards its character. No blind who remains without eyes, but I see those blind eyes. ⁽⁸⁾

Apart from these, his famous poem entitled *Layl al-Ashwâq* contains Abu Mâdi's most profound message of love, that love is a particularly good example of lyrical and emotional qualities, reflected in this poem:

"A soul where love has not shown is a soul ignorant of itself... Through love I have found myself, through love I have come to know God." ⁽⁹⁾

It has been observed that the romantic poet Iliya Abu Mâdi did not resort to old Phoenician myths to show his ideas, but took as his symbols familiar objects, they were mostly from nature. Therefore, most of the titles of his volumes indicate the extent of his interest in the context of nature. In this connection, his book *al-shâ'irfi al-samâ'* (The poet in the Sky) describes the beauty of nature and expresses his desire for Lebanon in the following manner:

"I miss the valleys, flowers, nice smell, birds, nature, grapefruit, water, light, and air of Lebanon" ⁽¹⁰⁾

Furthermore, we find that Iliya Abu Mâdi also derived much of his inspiration from popular contemporary culture. In fact, his poetry often visualizes strength of spirit and an optimism greatly needed by a frustrated nation necessitating to muster all its spiritual resources. ⁽¹¹⁾

Dr. Taha Husayn made criticism on a group of poets; the poet Iliya Abu Mâdi was one of them. In fact, his criticism was on the point of the form of Arabic poetry and its language. In this connection, Taha Husayn is deemed to be fallen into the mistake of talking about Abu Mâdi as being a poet belonged to that very group of poets. It is aware of the fact that that very group of poets was endowed with a fertile poetic nature, strong talents and far reaching imagination. As regards, criticism went that they could have been good poets, but they have not perfected their grasp on the poetic tools; they ignore the language and make this ignorance a law. Taha Husayn also wanted to say that Abu Mâdi was of lack of concern for music in poetry and accused him as a pessimistic poet as well. But this statement is far from truthfulness because his poetry is full of music of varying rhythms. As it appears from his overall poetry, one cannot excuse Abu Mâdi for his occasional mistakes of language for his strong linguistic basis.

It is known that all Mahjar poetry was condemned by 'Azîz Abâz on the linguistic and structural grounds. Following him, Luwîs 'Awad, one of Egypt's foremost critic, made a harsh criticism on Abu Mâdi. But, it is a matter of fact that Luwîs 'Awad's criticism was based on Taha Husayn's criticism. Both the critics reiterated that Abu Mâdi was a simply a romantic poet. It is indicated earlier that Taha Husayn made a critical attack on Abu Mâdi and Mahjar poet that they had ignorance of the Arabic language, which is deemed to be the crime against language and meter. Needless to say

that it is a surprising criticism done by an influential critic found in the tradition of modern poetry. On the other hand, it appears that the Mahjar authors especially Gibrân and Abu Mâdî renovated the modern Arabic poetic language. ⁽¹²⁾

In fact, Abu Mâdi as a poet had many experiences of life, which gave him different elements for composing romantic poems with a connection of nature and its beauty. In this regard, we notice that the Ottoman authorities once sent forth him to exile in 1912 and he saw in America a refuge and a shelter. Thereupon he wrote a poem praising the American flag and declaring him an American patriot. Abu Mâdî's existential pessimism is quintessentially American: it finds its roots in the depression of the 1930's, the First and the Second World Wars and subsequently the cold war. In the context of a poem entitled "The Bomb of Annihilation" Abu Madi expressed mundane uneasiness at the nuclear threat; and during the post war era people found dejection. ⁽¹³⁾

CONCLUSIONS

In the field of romanticism, Iliya Abu Mâdî established him as one of the famous poets of romanticism. He transmitted the message of nature through his poems at different levels. In Fact, there is a great significance in the poetry produced by Iliya Abu Madi; his poems bear the trend of romanticism, expressed in the narrative style with a message of suffering tales, poverty, treachery, death heroism, devotion and noble deeds which fill the diverse stories of the human being.

As a poet, Iliya Abu Mâdî expressed narrative poetry with his own ideas on society, freedom, and tyranny, or the tragic Love story in his poetry. Nature does not deny anyone the opportunities to enjoy its beauties, rich or poor, powerful or weak, handsome or ugly. People, therefore, ought to live in harmony with nature. He considers the nature as an embodiment of the Divine spirit as reflected in his poetry as well. In fact, he was more popular in the Arab World than he was in America. His poems are still taught in almost all schools in the Arab World. In the field of romanticism, Iliya Abu Mâdi was undoubtedly one of the important figures of the Mahjar literature.

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