

Identity Crisis Facing Islamic Literature

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ABSTRACT

This article is aimed at examining challenges in literary arena against the advancement of Islamic literature. It attempts to solve the problem of identifying the position of Islamic literature in the face of the mainstream of Western literature. The main objective of the article is to prove the shifting paradigm of Islamic literature. Several points would be discussed in order to ascertain the shifting paradigm. The points include confusions over Islamic literature, comparison between two distinctive eras of every Islamic literary activity that consist of the Classical time, i.e., the early Islamic period up to the epoch of Islamic civilization and the modern time. The article is written to examine the development of present literary activities of Islam and non-Islam. This is to explore the differences and similarities that might arise from the literary activities and necessitate the present Islamic literature to be reviewed so that it conforms to Islamic teachings. In other words, this article attempts to put forward a new identity for Islamic literature in line with the spirit of Islam and the need of modern time.

ABSTRAK

Artikel ini bertujuan menyelidiki cabaran dalam arena kesusasteraan terhadap perkembangan sastera Islam. Ia cuba menyelesaikan masalah mengenal pasti kedudukan sastera Islam dalam menghadapi arus perdana sastera barat. Objektif utama artikel ini adalah untuk membuktikan peralihan paradigma sastera Islam. Beberapa persoalan akan dibincangkan untuk menentukan peralihan paradigma tersebut. Persoalan tersebut termasuk kekeliruan tentang sastera Islam, perbandingan antara dua era yang ketara bagi semua aktiviti kesusasteraan Islam yang terdiri daripada zaman klasik, iaitu era awal Islam sehingga zaman kemuncak tamadun Islam dan zaman moden. Artikel ini ditulis untuk menyelidiki perkembangan aktiviti kesusasteraan Islam dan bukan Islam hari ini. Ia dilakukan bagi meninjau perbezaan dan persamaan yang mungkin timbul daripada kegiatan kesusasteraan tersebut dan memerlukan sastera Islam hari ini disemak semula agar ia selaras dengan ajaran Islam. Dengan kata lain, artikel ini cuba mengetengahkan suatu identiti baru bagi sastera Islam selaras dengan roh Islam dan keperluan zaman moden.

INTRODUCTION

Islamic literature is always associated with the past of Islamic history. Although the identification is acceptable looking back at the historical development of Islamic literature, this point of view should be reconsidered to overcome challenges of changing time. The mainstream of West-influenced literature has been dominating both Islamic and non-Islamic literature that it overshadows Islamic literary activity. Moreover, many Muslim writers are of the opinion that their literary sources must be derived from the history of the Muslim communities' struggles to uphold Islam and defend their faith. Works that are outside the frame of the history tend to be regarded as non-Islamic. No matter how many theories have been developed around the definition of Islamic literature, still the theories are constricted with the past.

Shahnon Ahmad, a prominent figure of Islamic Malay literature proposes that Islamic literature must be built on *tawhid*, theology and tendency towards spreading Islam. Conversely, Kassim Ahmad calls for the widening of the conception of Islamic literature so that it includes non-Muslim works that are concerned with the universality as has been proposed by Islam. The latter regards Western or other ideology-biased literature as Islamic as long as it is acceptable to Islam (Kassim Ahmad & Shahnon Ahmad 1987: 17-36). Departing from the uncertainty or ambiguity of the concept, i.e., whether it must be confined to the past or must be widened, this article attempts to discover the true identity of Islamic literature.

To obtain the dynamic conception of Islamic literature, underlined here are five points of view to be studied. The points include discussions of the confusion over Islamic literature, the history of Islamic literature, comparison between medieval and modern periods, challenges against Islamic literatures progress and lastly, re-appraisal of the conception of Islamic literature.

CONFUSION OVER ISLAMIC LITERATURE

The fact that too much concern has been given by most *ulama* on Islamic *da'wah* and theology has misled Muslims into believing that there is no literature in Islam as it is just imagination that could deviate them from religious practices. Consequently, Islamic literature has been marginalized. Muslim scholars interested in Islamic literature are divided on what Islamic literature is. On the one hand, some scholars mistakenly relate Islamic literature solely with the past, arguing that there are no more Muslim writers like those of the Abbasid period. The modern time is allegedly dominated by worldviews of non-Islamic literature. On the other hand, some other scholars still believe that Muslim writers' works should merely be related with *da'wah* and *tawhid*. Admittedly, there are few works discussing the identity of Islamic literature

such as *Nazariyah al-adab fi daw' al-Islam* (n.d.) of 'Abd al-Hamid Buzuwaynah, *al-Adab al-Islami insaniiyatuh wa 'alamiiyatuh* (1987) of Adnan Ali Ridha al-Nahwi and *Kesusasteraan Islam Sehimpunan Bahan Rujukan* (1997) of Haji Muhammad Bukhari Lubis. However, the tone of the writers seem to be monotonous in relating Islamic literature with Islamic *tawhid* and *da'wah*, and seem rather prejudiced against the mainstream of Western literature. The notions that there is no literature in Islam and that Islamic literature should merely be concerned with *da'wah* and *tawhid*, may arise from a misunderstanding of the Quran as the *mu'jizat*, miracle in supporting Prophet Muhammad (s.a.w.) and confusion over the difference of *adab* and literature.

Retrospectively, Prophet Muhammad (s.a.w.), as he was in Makkah, was sent as a messenger by Allah to preach Islam to the non-believers of Makkah and even the entire human beings. In order to uphold the cause of Islam, the Prophet was prepared with a *mu'jizat*. Like the previous prophets, he was endowed with a *mu'jizat* conforming to his people. Prophet Isa (a.s.) was endowed with a *mu'jizat* of healing and resuscitating the dead with the permission of Allah whereas Prophet Muhammad was honoured with the Quran that served as a counter-attack against Jahiliyyah poets. Arabs of the Jahiliyyah time were said to be rhetoricians and have expressive ability. Their words had so beautiful and profound meanings that most of them became poets. They would certainly exchange their literary and rhetorical expression for the sake of pride. Their literati, i.e., poets of a certain clan would compete with the poets of another clan to prove each other's high proficiency in poetry and rhetoric. The coming of the Quran, indeed, had challenged their pride in both poetry and rhetoric. Should they be able to overcome the inimitability of the Quran, they would have done so (al-Rafi'i 1974: 166-169).

The Prophet was labelled by the *mushrikin*, i.e., the unbelievers, as a poet, astrologer or magician who was possessed by evils because he used beautiful words and unfamiliar things. They just did not want to believe him. They accused him of learning *samawi* (attributed to heaven) teachings from People of the Book (al-Rafi'i 1974: 170-172). Despite the resistance and rejection, there were still people fascinated with the Quran and converted to Islam like 'Umar ibn al-Khattab (al-Rafi'i 1974: 212-213) and Tufayl ibn 'Amru al-Dawsī. Al-Dawsī who was a respectable poet came to Makkah and was prevented by some Quraysh people from approaching Prophet Muhammad on the pretext that the man who claimed prophecy was mad and caused the people to be divided. However, he insisted on getting near the prophet after listening to the beautiful Quranic words expressed by the prophet. Later, he converted to Islam (Matlub 1973: 120). There were many more people converted to Islam because of feeling attracted by the beauty and the extraordinariness, i.e., the aesthetical aspects, of the Quran.

Allah commanded Prophet Muhammad (s.a.w.) to remind *al-a'rab*, i.e., Arabs of the land that they had not been yet true believers but Muslims and

a true belief was not there in their hearts (al-Hujurat: 14). This is to certify that certain converts to Islam then declared their conversion out of their fascination with the *adab* of Islam rather than their fascination with the essence of Islam.

The Quran, apart from being the constitution, could be regarded as a kind of the masterpiece of Allah, i.e., the brilliant speech of Allah to vindicate Prophet Muhammad (s.a.w.). Since the people of Quraysh at the time of Prophet Muhammad (s.a.w.) were considered to be intellectual, the relevant *mu'jizat* should be the unsurpassed "work", i.e., the Quran. Jahiliyah people did not only knew the existence of the *samawi* religions as they were in contact with People of the Book, Jews and Christians, they were also aware of the coming of Islam and the prophet. Taha Husayn proposed that the Quran was not "new" to the Arabs and if the Quran was "new" for the Arabs (in terms of certain information) there would not be those believers. He added that the Quran was new in terms of stylistics and its teachings. He was certain that the Quran was literary conforming to the situation dominated by literary Arabic language and writings then, i.e., in the Jahiliyah time (Husayn n.d: 71). The Quran even mentions that some of Arab Jews knew of the coming of Islam but after its coming, they fought it (al-Baqarah: 89).

Almost all of the historical accounts within the Quran, such as those concerning Adam and Hawa (Eve) and their descendants, and the previous *ummah* or people were in their knowledge but they did not know the worlds of *jinns*, other invisible creatures, and the secrets of nature and so on. Although they did not believe in the Hereafter or the Day of Resurrection, they understood most of the Quranic contents. The Quran is not only meant to give information to its audience but it is also intended to challenge the unbelievers like Quraysh *mushrikin* (unbelievers). There are several verses of the Quran, for example verses 23 and 24 of *al-Baqarah*, verses 13 and 14 of *Hud*, and verse 88 of *al-Isra'* challenging the *mushrikin* to contend with the unsurpassed inimitability, i.e. *mu'jizat* of the Quran. The Quran challenged Arabs of rhetoric and poetry then merely in terms of *mufatarayat*, i.e., imagination and creativity rather than scientific facts as can be found in the Quran. However, had the renown Quraysh literati tried to overcome the inimitability of the Quran, even short *surahs* posed them hindrance in producing competitive chapter (*Sarah*) like a Quranic one (Al-Rafi'i 1974: 192-193).

In the *Surah al-Nur*, there is the most beautiful example of a literary aspect of the Quran concerning words playing or punning while the *Surah Yusuf* is the example of generic contents or a literary form itself. In verse thirty-five of the *Surah of al-Nur*, we would be amazed by the beautiful comparison of the beauty of Allah with the crystal in which is a lamp and in the lamp is a glass. The glass is likened to a glittering star and so on (*al-Nur* 35). As far as the *Surah Yusuf* is concerned, it can be assumed as the best Quranic story as is acknowledged at the beginning of the *surah*. It is about Prophet

Yusuf from his early life until he became the king of Egypt. Although the story is centred around the prophet, its story features should not be dismissed.

Secondly, the confusion over the concepts of *adab* (literally literature) and literature does play a part in the rejection of literature from the boundary of Islam. We have been familiar with the concept of literature put forward by the West that departed from its divide from the religion of Christianity. The Western conception of literature could be ascribed to humanism, i.e., belief that took "human experience as the starting point for man's knowledge of self and the work of God and Nature" It was a belief that human developments in various fields came from human himself rather than divine revelation and it was against orthodox Christianity then (Bullock et al. 1988: 396). It was from humanism or secularism that appeared Western classicism, romanticism, realism, feminism, modernism and so on as all of these schools did not count religion in their consideration of literary paradigms. In other words, the literary schools merely represent differences of human minds that do not depart from the essential need of human, i.e., the spiritual part or religion. The Western concept of literature that was secularized was exported out to the "New World" or "Unhistorical World" through colonization, manipulative writing and distortion of native literature, and introduction of and imposing the colonizers' literature. To nurture the concept in the "New World", the colonizers had to wipe out or sweep aside the history of the colonized and make it unhistorical by imposing on the aboriginal, new doctrines in place of their tradition. Thus, they spread the new doctrines through education and accentuate their conception of literature and marginalizing local literature (Bassnett 1993: 17-20, 72-86 & 92-4). Local literary works had been confiscated and put in such old museums as British Museum and Leiden Museum. Otherwise, some old local literary works were translated into new and biased ideas or criticism of the native literature.

The Western concept of literature is learned through works of Shakespear, Spencer, Milton and so on (Bassnett 1993. 18), which had been written principally not being based on religious consciousness but had been devoted only to entertainment and vivid pleasure. Since the Western concept overwhelms the literary arena of Muslim world, *adab* that is concomitant and coexistent with Islam has been marginalized and been put aside or has been made unknown of its existence. Many modern Muslim writers do not explore the concept *adab* and draw upon it in their writings. This might arise from their perception that *adab* does not suit modern literary taste or it is just related with the literature of the past that is no more suitable for the modern time. Conversely, *adab* is, indeed, representative of literary taste and has more profound meanings. Apart from being related with entertainment, it has a favourable connotation of etiquette or moral aspects. During the coming of Islam, *adab* was used to stand for moral inculcation and upbringing. Later, *adab* was exerted to describe literary activity of writing poetry and prose for

both poetry and prose, then to emphasize moral aspects. In the words of Darwish, literature is the mirror of society, that is to say Muslim writers must be critical of social ills and cater for the need of *ummah* (Darwish 1971: 4).

Adab that was first related to upbringing, moral inculcation and the like became connected with literature in the early Abbasid period the second century A.D. (the eighth century of Hijrah) or possibly earlier while at the same time it referred to knowledge of various types (Ashtiany et al. 1990: 19). *Adab*'s connection with the development of literature could be explained by the fact that literature of the time was dominated with intellectualism and moral cultivation or social criticism in addition to its connotation of entertainment. There were many literati or scholars then talking on social criticism and trying to cultivate virtues through literature such as al-Jahiz with his works such as *al-Bayan wa al-Tabyin* and *Kitab al-Bukhala*. The appearance of such figures as al-Jahiz, al-Mubarrad with his work *al-Kamil*, Ibn al-Muqaffa⁶ who could be regarded as a moralist with his translations such as *Kalilah wa dimnah* and many others indicated a strong association of *adab* (literature) with social criticism (Dayf n.d: III, 441-573). The connection of *adab* (literature) with *adab* (virtues) underlined the inculcation of Islamic values in the Muslims of the period.

Although there were poems that went against Islamic values such as poems on mischief and parochialism (*qabaliyah*), the poets were motivated by political inclinations and patronage of the Umayyid and Abbasid *dawlah* (government). Apart from that, the literary activity did not belong to poets who were patronized and indeed, many poets or literary writers who were populist were active (Dayf n.d: III, 434-440). Admittedly, it is the populist writers who ran down in history being forgotten or put aside since they stressed morality and intellectualism and the like rather than mischief and political parochialism. Even the time when poetry activity was tainted with *mujun* or obscenity coming from certain statesmen's irreligious practices, i.e., *Sasaniyah* tradition of using male slaves and female singers in court, there appeared Islamic poets guarding against the vices. Islamic poets would write poetry on asceticism or self-denial, *taqwa* and sufism (Dayf n.d: III, 382-413).

Although the use of *adab* in Jahiliyah time scarcely been related with etiquette or morality as it was later in Islamic period, some poetry representative of Jahiliyah literary activity described the history of Arabs before Islam. Through the Jahiliyah poetry, such battles as those between Arabs and Persians, al-Nazzarin and al-Yamaniyin, al-Yamaniyin and al-Yamaniyin, al-Khazraj and al-Aws, Harb al-Basus between Bakr and Taghlab clans, and so on were recorded (Kahhalah 1972: 9). The coming of Islam made Jahiliyah poetry dwindle and when Islam was established in the Arab world, Arab poets started to avail themselves of Islamic poetry that was inspired by the Quran and Hadith. The concept of *adab* that had been scarcely identified with manners or morality in Jahiliyah time was developed by Islam into a dynamic word

that covered good aspects of upbringing, teaching and intellectualism. Prophet Muhammad (s.a.w.) once said, "I was sent as Prophet to accomplish good manners."

Adab should be separated from literature. Although literary activities of the former and the latter are descriptive of human experience and imagination, the principles underlying both are not really the same. The former is bound by the religiosity of Islam while the latter is a separation from religiosity and tradition.

A HISTORY OF ISLAMIC LITERATURE: BETWEEN *AL-JADD* AND *AL-HAZL*

It is acknowledged that Islam has changed the image of pre-Islamic Arabic literature. Al-Quran and the Prophet's sayings and actions swayed Arab literature from wayward literary production. The Quran not only prevented them from obscenity and abuse, instead, it also encouraged them to say or deliver good messages to the audience. Verses concerning the etiquette of poets in the *Surah al-Shu'ara* seemingly discourage Muslims from becoming poets because most of them are liars and instigators abetting criminals and perpetrators. However, the verses warn Muslim poets from being deviants and distortionists in their poetry as is stated at the end of the *surah* 'except those who are believers, do good deeds and remember Allah all the time...' (*al-Shu'ara*: 224-227).

The coming of Islam did not actually stop Arabic literary activities rather it had shifted the paradigm of *Jahiliyah* perception of literariness to new Islamic identity. The Quran had inspired Muslim literature to evade the hollowness of *Jahiliyah* poetry by putting forward the coexistence of literature with facts, various types of knowledge and the like apart from the introduction of new teachings through *adab*, i.e. literature of the Quran. Going through the Quran, we would come across many verses regarding the concept of oneness or *tawhid* of Allah that is delivered through observation of how the universe and men were created. As for astronomy, the reader of the Quran would encounter symbolism, simile and so on indicative of how all of the planets and stars move in the universe, and how night and day is "transformed" into each other (Yasin: 37-40). How the world in turning around is described by the slow movement like clouds' of mountains (al-Naml: 88). There are many other types of knowledge presented in the literary way of the Quran. This illustrates that the Quran had inspired Muslim literature, then to combine literature with intellectualism besides upbringing and cultivation of virtues.

Instead of being static, poetry during the early Islam was used to defend Islam against Quraysh. The *mushrikin* of Makkah did not only assault Muslim military force in Madinah but also discredited and insulted Islam, Prophet

Muhammad and Muslims generally through poetry. Before the coming of Islam, Makkah had never witnessed many Makkah's poets coming into being. Most of the pre-Islamic Makkah's poets were those embracing religion of *hanif* like Waraqah ibn Nawfal and so on. However, when there were enmity and fierce battles between the Muslims of Madinah and the *mushrikin* Quraysh, suddenly many Quraysh poets appear, such as Abu Sufyan ibn Al-Harith, Abdullah ibn Al-Zibārī, Dharar ibn Al-Khattab al-Fihri, Abu Azzah al-Jamhī and Hubayrah ibn Abī Wahab al-Makhzumī. Because of the fierce attacks of the Quraysh poets on Islam, Prophet Muhammad (s.a.w.) turned to his companions asking for those who would volunteer themselves to counter the attacks. Muslim poets were preceded by Hassan b. Thabit after answering the Prophet's request. He was followed suit by Ka'b ibn Malik and Abdullah ibn Rawwahah (Dayf n.d: II, 47).

Poetry of the early Islamic period had been overwhelmed with Islamic teachings namely of spiritual aspect of Islam, i.e., *tawhid* and belief, punishments and rewards from Allah as this period was the period of *da'wah* activities. Muslim poets then inspired by the Quran were targeting their satires at Quraysh *mushrikin*. Apart from that, many Muslim poets adapted Quranic verses in their poetry. Among the Quranic verses adapted by the poets were those related to *taqwa*, the sign of death's coming and life in the hereafter and Allah's punishment and reward to His servants as were found in the poetry of al-Husayn ibn Al-Humam. Some of the poets had been concerned with *jihād*, the Holy War against non-believers while others were interested in their pride of Islam (Dayf n.d: II, 68-76).

The strength of the faith of Muslim life towards Islam had made poetry concerned with the principle of *al-jadd*, i.e., concern over serious matters in literary activity. Consequently, poetry of *al-hazl* (opposite to *al-jadd*) was abandoned once the poet had converted to Islam. Therefore, poets who tended to deviate from *al-jadd* to *al-hazl* would be subjected to social subjugation or disregard. A poet from the al-Hashas clan though having discussed matters of *al-jadd* or crucial matters, was killed during the reign of Caliph 'Uthman for his poem on obscene love talk (Dayf, n.d: II, 75). The concept of *al-jadd* had so moulded literary activities that poetry containing *Jahiliyah* elements of love and drunkenness was looked down upon. The coming of the Quran with its *al-jadd* in terms of substance and form, i.e., Quranic contents and prose style had changed the perception of the *Jahiliyah* and early Muslim literati that literature was only concerned with *al-hazl*. The Quran had proved that serious matters conform with literature.

Consciousness of *al-jadd* in Islam had led into existence genres of *khutbah* (oration) and *risalah* especially at the times of Prophet Muhammad (s.a.w.) and the Righteous Caliphs (*al-Khulafa' al-Rashidun*). It was made possible due to the fact that the sayings, especially orations or *khutab* (the plural for *khutbah*) of Prophet Muhammad were interpretations of the al-Quran, ora-

tions were parts of *ibadah* such as before *Jum'ah* prayer and after *al-adha* and *al-fitr* celebration prayers. Besides, oration was the best way for delivering messages on Islam. Caliph Abu Bakr had given orations stimulating unity and cultivating the spirit of *jihad* among Muslim individuals at the time when Prophet Muhammad's soul had been returned to Allah, the day of *al-Saqifah* and when many Arabs became renegades and did not want to pay *zakah*. The reigns of Caliph Abu Bakr and Caliph Umar ibn Al-Khattab had seen heavy exertion of orations to spur the spirit of *jihad* among Muslim fighters. This was due to the fact that Muslims were faced with threats of the big powers from Rome in Syria, the Persians and the Iraqis. It required the sacrifices of Muslim fighters in terms of martyrdom to spread Islam in the region (Dayf n.d: II, 106-108).

Risalah was the best way apart from *khutbah* to spread Islam. At the time of Prophet Muhammad (s.a.w.) it was used to correspond with the Quraysh non-believers, Jews of Khaybar, Hirqal ruler of Rome, al-Maquqas ruler of Egypt and al-Najashy ruler of Habshah to assert the presence and truth of Islam. Caliph Abu Bakr and Caliph Umar ibn Al-Khattab took the same measures by sending *rasa'il* (the plural for *risalah*), i.e., letters to states which had been controlled by the Muslims so that the governors of the states would be able to implement directives from Madinah and submit to the Caliph (Dayf n.d: II, 131-133). Because of challenges facing Muslims' integrity, *al-jadd* had occupied literary activities at the times of Prophet Muhammad and the Righteous Caliphs. As such, arised genres of *al-jadd* in the form of *khutbah* and *al-risalah*.

When Islam was established in the Arab world during the Umawid and Abbasid periods, *al-hazl* began to occupy the literary domain. Poetry once again was being drawn upon heavily as Umawid caliphs were indulging in kind of peace although they were faced with internal conflicts as Muslim community became divided over the legitimacy of Umawid caliphate. Umawid caliphs were indulging in prosperity and wealth coming from efforts spent by the previous caliphs in opening up states to Islam and confiscating the native wealth. Gold, silver and gems were obtained by Umawid caliphs so much so that they could build palaces and become extravagant. Officials were being distracted from being critical of the Umawid caliphate and being silenced by being given money and gifts. Their wealth was being spent on patronized singers, a tradition taking after that of Persia and Rome. Likewise, poets were being patronized by ministers and caliphs alike. The people took a leaf from their leaders by developing much more poetry (Dayf n.d: II, 139-143).

The Abbasid era saw the combination and assimilation of *al-jadd* and *al-hazl* taking place due to the developments of knowledge and entertainment as had been enjoyed during the Umawid period. Like Umawid caliphs, Abbasid caliphs were living in extravagance in terms of building palaces and decorating them with Sasanian tradition, and patronising poets and singers and some of

the officials followed suit (Dayf n.d: III, 44-47). Despite extravagance, however, most Abbasid caliphs especially Harun and al-Ma'mun were concerned with developing various types of knowledge. It was widely known that Caliph Harun al-Rashid and his son really cared about the introduction of Hellenistic philosophy and science into Muslim intellectualism. The Arabs not only deepened their knowledge about Islam but also were trying to understand and translate into Arabic various types of knowledge from people who had been brought to subscription to Islam. Teachings on Islam and its revealed knowledge were organized nearly everywhere in mosques and palaces, and the teachers were honoured with gifts and money (Dayf n.d: III, 98-102).

Intellectualism and entertainment were factors leading to the assimilation of *al-jadd* and *al-hazl*. Thus, we saw the development of poetry and singing representative of *al-hazl* while some poets who were concerned about Islam stressed *al-jadd*. Poetry of *al-jadd* basically discussed religious, spiritual and political matters apart from knowledge. The Abbasid era also witnessed the closing up of gap between *al-jadd* and *al-hazl*. Prose was the best example of how the cynical writer had manipulated and ridiculed political situations of Abbasid caliphate. Such books as *Kitab al-Bukhala* and *al-Bayan wa al-Tabyin* written by al-Jahiz, *Kalilah wa Dimnah* of Ibn al-Muqaffa' and *Alf Laylah wa Laylah* (anonymous) represented cynicism of the writers towards social and political development during the Abbasid period. The assimilation of *al-jadd* and *al-hazl* was spurred by the introduction of foreign tradition and intellectualism into the Abbasid society through translation activities and conversion of non-Arab writers or scholars to Islam (Dayf n.d: III, 441-442).

So far we have become familiarized with the concepts of *al-jadd* and *al-hazl*, and a question arises here is whether the former represents Islamic literariness while the latter does not. To answer this question, we need to separate the literary concepts of *al-jadd* and *al-hazl* from their identification with obscenity, drunkenness and other chastised characteristics that are viewed as sinful. *Al-jadd* and *al-hazl* are literary and "timeless" concepts. Historically, these concepts happened to be in literary activities of the medieval period. Immoral acts such as obscenity, drunkenness and the like should not be identified as belonging to *al-jadd* or *al-hazl*. In other words, the content of a work is shaped by the tendency of the writer rather than by a dominant literary school. Sa'di al-Shirazi (600-691H), a medieval Persian writer, succeeded in combining both *al-jadd* and *al-hazl* in his didactic work *Gulistan (al-Rawdah)* (n.d.), Arabic version). Thus, legitimacy, i.e., *halal* and *haram* lies in the characteristics or messages of a work and not in the concepts of *al-jadd* and *al-hazl*.

MEDIEVAL AND MODERN ISLAMIC LITERATURE: A COMPARISON

A comparison of medieval Islamic works with modern Islamic works could lead to prejudice against the significance of the former in relation with modern literary taste. It is due to the fact that medieval prose had little influence over modern Arabic prose. Secondly, the former tends to be regarded as representative of Islam whereas the latter is considered to be "tainted" with Western influence. The prejudice arises from the fact that there is a historical gap between the development of medieval Islamic and modern Arabic literature. The attribution of Islam to the past Arabic literature is viewed in terms of generic forms such as poetry, *khutbah*, *risalah*, translations of non-Arabic sources and *maqamah*, rather than the content of a work itself. Examples of this criticism can be discerned in the works of Shawqī Dayf, *Tarikh al-Adab al-‘Arabi* (n.d) in three volumes and the work of Mustafa Sadiq al-Rafi‘i, *Tarikh Adab al-‘Arab* (1974). In contrast, scholars of modern Arabic literature such as Anis Maqdisi tend to ascribe the creation of modern Arabic prose, i.e., short story and novel or novelette to the literary influence of the West over the Arab literary activities (Maqdisi 1981. 369-371). The question is, how far has the West moulded modern Arabic literature in terms of prose, mainly short story, novel and novelette and how far has this circumstance swayed modern Arabic literature from being influenced by Islam.

Modern scholars seem to attribute the existence of modern Arabic prose to the emergence and influence of Western literary romanticism. This literary school emphasizes the existence of social gap between the have and the have-not through kind of love stories. There seems to be a misinterpretation or misleading emphasis of what romanticism is among modern critics. Romanticism of modern Arab literature has wrongly and solely attributed to the modernization of Egyptian education, politics and economy through colonization. *Zainab* (1914) of Husayn Haykal is considered by Arab and Western scholars to be the interpretation of Western romanticism because the writer tried to introduce women emancipation into Arab patriarchal society, then by putting forward western loose and gregarious life (Kilpatrick 1974: 20-26). Apart from that, an emphasis is given by writers cynical of the West on the origin of Western romanticism that came about during the Renaissance, from Western social conflict between bourgeoisie and proletariat. The social conflict is said to have led to the existence of a kind of mental liberalization by forsaking reasoning and turning to mere imagination as escapism from the reality of life. Finally, it led to destruction of good codes of conduct (al-Nahwi 1987: 192-193). This perception of romanticism is proposed by Western and Arab scholars who seem to emphasize the existence of modern Arabic works written by such writers as Najib Mahfuz, Yusuf Idris, and Hanan Shaykh whose novels and short stories are sensational and controversial in the eye of Islam.

Having done so, modern critics seem to dismiss romanticism in Islamic pieces contributed by writers such as Najib al-Kilani and the others.

Romanticism, to some extent, has been politicized since the West is considered against Islam. Western literary schools such as classicism, romanticism and realism are considered to be the products of the divide of Western social lives of economic, social and political affairs from the true religion of Christianity (al-Nahwī 1987: 179-188). It is true that the Western literary schools came about from the breakaway of Western society from medieval church controlled life but we cannot deny contributions of those literati such as Najib al-Kilani who have introduced the concept of Islamicism in story writing. He put forward the concept of *shumuliyah* (literally being comprehensive), i.e., the concept of conscious and impartial story-writing about Muslim communities regardless of nationality and complexion not restricted with Arabs' experience or history (Husayn 1416H: 46-49). Through the works of Najib al-Kilani, *al-Layali al-Sud fi Turkistan* (Dark Nights in Turkistan) and *'Azra' Jakarta* (The Virgin of Jakarta), the reader could recognize the treatment by the writer of the horrendous suppression of Muslim communities in both Turkistan and Indonesia. The writer discusses in the works the reality or realism aspect on one hand and romanticism on the other but he still does not cross the boundary of Islamism (Hadarah 1416H: 8-13; al-Sharif 1416H: 90-92).

Therefore, we need to separate literary schools of classicism, romanticism, realism etc. from messages that represent the real intention of the writer calling the reader to do good deeds or vice versa. Although classicism, romanticism, realism etc. originated from the Christian West and from the division of the religion from social affairs of the West, the literary schools represent the true dimensions of the Western life. These dimensions of life, for instance, firstly the classical style of suppression by the have of the have-not, secondly the romanticism, i.e., the escapism of the have-not from life burden through reflections and being reclusive (Bullock et al. 1988: 751) etc. could happen in another society's life. The manipulation by the feudal of the peasants was recorded in the history of the final moment of the Abbasid period and it was also written in the history of any society used to practise slavery.

Romanticism that was the spur for the coming into being of stories in the forms of short stories, novelette and novel is there in every society. Like the West, when the have had so much manipulating the subordinate that the latter under suppression and frustration resorted to seclusion from the rest of society and turned into self-reflections, the same picture had happened in medieval Arab society at the end of Abbasid period. Romanticism represents the writing of stories which reflects the taste of the have-not, the suppressed and the minority while classicism symbolizes the arrogance and pomposity of the upper class.

There was romanticism in medieval Arabic literature that did, in a way or another, contribute to the emergence and development of modern Arabic prose. The Arab literati had many vast sources of writing and were capable of spreading stories but short of modern standard. Nevertheless, their capability of writing a story typical of a modern novel could not be underestimated. One of the sources was Quranic stories such as those of *Hud Hud*, *al-Naml*, prophets, histories of ancient peoples, *Ya'juj* and *Ma'juj*, etc. Moreover, the Quranic stories became the medium for delivering messages on Islam then. Secondly, Umawid caliphs showed so much a particular interest in stories that they took up and patronized brilliant and knowledgeable storytellers. Thirdly, *Jahiliyah* fables and the history of the early Islamic struggles in addition to mythical stories of Muslim figures can be the best source for prose writing equivalent with that of modern time. Lastly, ancient Arabs were in touch with most ancient civilizations (Ibrahim 1972: 50-96).

The comparison of messages put forth by medieval and modern Islamic literary products enlightens us on how we are misled into believing that most modern Islamic works have been "tainted" We are led into believing that there is a wide gap between Islamic and non-Islamic literature and that there should never be similarity that bridges the gap. In the view of the conservative clerics or *ulama*, Muslim writers are expected to be orientated on *da'wah*, that is narrowly perceived and theology, i.e., the Oneness of Allah. The question is whether Islamic literature should represent *da'wah*, that is related to the direct calling to submission to Allah's commands or whether it must emphasize the oneness of Allah by putting aside other aspects of *da'wah*. In other words, should the ideal aspects of Islam be concerned with the literary products? Looking back at the history of medieval Islamic literature, we would find the literature cross the boundary of the so-called *da'wah* and *tawhud*, i.e., theology.

The literature of medieval Islamic period was representative of social and political criticism. During the Umawid, there were political clashes between *al-'Alawiyyin*, who opposed the establishment, and *al-Umawiyyin*, representative of the Umawid caliphate. Poets were being dragged into the political domain by the opposing sides. When Mu'awiyah ibn Abi Sufyan breached his promise that the caliphate would be the matter of the whole Muslims' decision, by appointing his son Yazid to be the caliph, Prophet Muhammad's (s.a.w.) companions rose up and fought against the decision. Yazid exerted pressure on those Madinans (attribution to al-Madinah) who opposed his appointment, which was why poets' cynicism of the caliph revolted against the suppression and greed of the caliph (Dayf n.d: II, 290-296). During the Abbasid era, anti-Arabism spread throughout the empire calling for equal rights and freedom from Arab political machinery. This movement was plotted by non-Arabs, especially the Persians who had occupied the Abbasid administration and mastered Islamic intellectualism. Consequently,

pro-Arab writers exerted poetry to counter attack non-Arab literati. However, many intellectuals then maintained the integrity and unity of the Abbasid through literature, and abstained from being involved in the conflict (Dayf n.d: III, 74-79).

When the Second World War ended, modernism of the West started to shape Arabic literature. Modern Arabic literature became political battlefield for those who opposed the establishment and it described political conflicts between the West and the East, between Islam and secularism, between capitalism and socialism, and between democracy and communism. The schools of thought of the colonized East, i.e., Islam, socialism and communism, had been adopted by writers of Egypt, Palestine and Iraq that were the centres of anti-British and the Ally colonization movements. Among the Arab poets, most critical of the colonization were Salah 'Abd al-Sabur (Egyptian), Badr Shakir al-Sayyab (Iraqi), Nazik Malaikah (Palestinian). However, the adoption of socialism and communism was in terms of philosophy, not the essence since such realism poets as mentioned above maintained their individual faith. Apart from that, there were writers taking up romanticism approach, i.e., stories criticism of the West and Western culture such as Yusuf Idris, Taha Lashin, Tawfiq al-Hakim etc. Tawfiq al-Hakim through his work *Yawmiyat Na'ib* (1937) and Yusuf Idris through *al-Haram* (1959) talk on social injustice and manipulation of the poor and ignorant by the upper-class society (Kilpatrick 1974: 44-47 & 118-122).

CHALLENGES OF WESTERN MAINSTREAM LITERATURE

While Islamic literature remains static as Muslim writers are searching for identity, Western literature has been progressing to fulfil the need of changing time. Muslim scholars argue that Islamic works must be in the domain of *tawhid*, glorifying Allah and for the sake of propagating Islam. Western writers have opened up their minds to the fact that literature is the reality of life, representing social conflicts. They have been talking on familial affairs, science, politics and philosophy. Their works enlighten us on creative and imaginative thinking on various issues. Their works seem to be more dynamic than contemporary Muslim works.

The most critical challenges posed by Western literature is that Western works, prose or poetry have managed to subject truth to suspicion, tradition to debate and religion to mockery. This is owing to the fact that tradition and religion of the West during the Dark Ages had so long stifled political and intellectual life, Western society had fought against the church that dominated Christianity. An example of how a truth was twisted into suspicion is the story of King Arthur and his infidel queen Guinevere. This story was rewritten from one generation to another. Before feminism came in to being, the

queen was portrayed by writers as the cause for the disunity of the royal family and the disruption of the succession of would-be kings after King Arthur. However, afterwards, the romance was rewritten by feminists portraying the king as a criminal of impotence leading to Guinevere committing adultery while, at the same time, she was portrayed as a true lover. The passionate queen was forgiven for having extra-marital affair (Bassnett 1993: 118-123).

When the Western society was freed from the church's grips and made much progress in various fields, tradition and religion has since been challenged. Truth becomes subjective and it no longer depends on religion or tradition. On the contrary, truth is an argument that depends on the mental strength, intellectualism and cunning of the individual. Thus, truth becomes divergent according to the classification and inclination of a writer while tradition is subjected to mockery. As such, comes into being feminism, modernism and postmodernism that, on the whole, challenge the establishment of tradition and religion. As feminism came about from women suppression by the Western patriarchal society before the Enlightenment Age, the uncontrolled feminism has since been critical of the tradition values especially concerning legal marriage and sexuality. Modernism was a movement appearing after political and ideological geographies had changed after the World War I and World War II. It was reformation movement of literature, music and arts generally that guarded its new aesthetic realm against intellectual, social and historical forces threatening it. Modernism was connected with the appearance of new and dominant political and social views then. Meanwhile, postmodernism is the worst of all since it refers to the present uncertainty of directions of views concerning morality and freedom as the world is too complicated in terms of technology and knowledge (Bullock et al. 1988: 312-313, 539-540 & 671).

When modernity permeated Muslim world through colonization that involved education and the rewriting of local history during the aftermath of the Second World War (when the West was dominant), Muslim society became divided into being recalcitrant and West-influenced groups. On one hand, some Muslim writers group was opposing the West and on the other hand there are those who accepted Western ideas through politics and literature. The French succeeded in dividing Muslim worldview into two groups; a group of pro-West radical intellectual Arabs and a group of anti-West conservative Azharites (attributed to *al-Azhar*). To cultivate Western inclination among Arab intellectuals especially literati, Napoleon Bonaparte set up in Egypt a theater for French drama presentations, modern schools, newspapers, observatories, a public library etc. (al-Dusuqi 1966: 21-22).

In 1801, Muhammad 'Ali, an 'Uthmaniyah admiral had dislodged the French and in 1805 after overthrowing 'Umar Mukarram 'Ali, an 'Uthmaniyah governor, made himself the ruler of Egypt. He managed to modernize Egyptian education by sending Egyptian students for further study in Paris and

established military and medical schools after French models (al-Dusuqī 1966: 25-26). Despite successive phases of the modernization of Arabic literature, there were still some other Arab writers who cherished the classicism of 'Uthmaniyyah poetry as it symbolized the unity of Muslim *ummah*. Jamaludin al-Afghani epitomized Muslim confrontation with the West, and poetry was representative of those who were against westernization of Arabic literature and it typified the glorious time of Muslim achievement during the Umayyid and Abbasid periods ('Izz al-din 1973: 31-37). Consequently, no wonder modern Arabic literature especially of prose are viewed suspiciously as non-Islamic by some scholars such as 'Adnan 'Ali Ridha al-Nahwī in *al-Adab al-Islami insanīyatuh wa 'alamīyatuh* (1987) and 'Abd al-Hamid Zuwaynah in *Nazariyyah al-Adab fi Dhaw' al-Islam* (n.d).

Not only Western mainstream of literature has kept abreast with changing time through its treatment of current topics or issues, it also put forward generic forms of story, i.e. short story, novelette and novel. Indeed, prose has been known from medieval Islamic period as effective literary way for social criticism. What should be questioned, therefore, is Islamism of the content not the origin and the generic form of a work.

RE-APPRAISAL OF THE CONCEPTION OF ISLAMIC LITERATURE

Islamic literature needs re-conception and breaking away from the common belief that Islamic literature must depart from generally perceived *tawhid* and *da'wah*. There are several points that should be considered concerning the re-conception. One is that in terms of concept, Islamic literature must not be restricted with *tawhid* and *da'wah* that are narrowly translated for *da'wah* is widely interpretable. *Da'wah* is not restricted with calling people to do good deeds and inculcating in the audience consciousness and conscience. *Da'wah* in Islamic literature should make the audience intellectually and mentally aware of what qualities and potentials they should have and to make them beware of vices and their destruction. Islamic literature should stress mental development and psychological thinking to make the reader understand circumstances and react positively. As a result, the readers of Islamic work become more aware of political, economical and other development of the world outside so that they can cope with the developments. In other words, Islamic works must be of current issues, related with Muslim world and non-Muslim world alike. They are not necessarily attributed with the past but most importantly with the present.

Secondly, it is important to understand the spirit of literature. It is the way of reasoning and counter-reasoning. It is the way to attract the audience of a certain period of time who are categorized in the intellectual group to see the truth not "truths" that could have been manipulated. This is described by

the way the Quran was given to the Prophet. Since Quraysh *mushrikin* could not see the Highest Truth, i.e. Islam and they would reason with the Prophet on Allah and the Resurrection Day and other tenets of Islam. The Quran was brought to the Prophet who became the preacher of the Quran's teachings, i.e., Islam in order to counter the arguments of non-believers that belittle and attack Islam. Those who read the Quran would understand that, coming across many types of counter-reasoning which represent allusion, the description of the world, allegorical references suggesting that the non-believers were wrong about the Highest Truth, i.e., Islam.

In the chapter of *al-Ghashiyah*, we were told that Allah is the Almighty by referring of the Quran to the creation of the universe and mankind. Almost all of the Quranic discussion on *tawhid* is delivered through the creation of universe and benefits of creatures for mankind. Such Quranic verses as those of *al-Ghashiyah* imply that to understand Allah is by observing *makhluqat*, i.e., Allah's creature and to see truth is by seeing examples, samples and reasoning. Therefore, it could be surmised that Islamic literature should not be as simple as preaching Islam through simple characters and plot of stories. Instead, it must keep pace with the intellectual development of a particular society. The more complex human thought and behaviour, the more complicated a work should be. It is because once the world is dominated with reasoning, truths becomes marginalized and degraded. Truth would be manipulated and twisted so that it would look like a false, and vice versa. Cases of truth being manipulated can be referred to the *Jahiliyah* time and examples that can be taken from other periods of time and different societies when they have reached the summit modernity of thinking.

During Abbasid period, Ibn al-Muqaffa^c translated *Kalilah wa Dimnah* from the Persian version. The reason why the work and the anonymous work *Alf Laylah wa Laylah* (known as Arabian Nights among English society) had captivated many hearts while they originated from Hindu is the way the work was written, i.e., allegorical elements which were the best way of reasoning. It is believed that Indian rulers of time immemorial, when the works were written, were autocratic, suppressive and abject of truths or criticism. They would pay little attention to the advice of their subordinates. *Alf Laylah wa Laylah* comprises copious mythical stories of animals, men including rulers and their subject, and invisible creature. The fame story is about Shahrīyar, ruler of India and Shahzaman his small brother, ruler of Samarkand. The big brother became disillusioned with women as faithful wives after he had been waken up by his brother to the infidelity of his queen wife. After that, he acted viciously marrying and killing a girl for every single night. Until he was betrothed to knowledgeable and intelligent Shahrīzad, daughter of one of his ministers, he began to realize, through the didactic stories told by his wife, that he had committed a horrendous crime of killing (*Alf Laylah wa Laylah* 1988: I, 5-8).

Ibn al-Muqaffa^c must have had a good reason why he felt the work need to be translated into Arabic. It was due to the fact that people's perception then of truth became variable. In other words, truth had been evaluated differently or partially according to individual taste, mood, interest etc. Since taste, mood and interest differed from one person to another, truth became no more truth and it became flexible and even truth was identified with reasoning. The first century of the Abbasid era was marked by a great intellectual agitation and it was the age of discovery of new science beside religious branches of knowledge. Since Caliph al-Makmun opened up intellectual discussions and dialogues among Muslim and non-Muslim scholars, intellectualism became out of hand. *Muktazilites* who were the champion of Muslim theology against non-Muslim rivals began to spread their belief that the Quran was created or new. Their view captivated the caliph so profoundly that he was imposing the new belief on Muslim society and those '*ulama*' who opposed him would be punished (Nicholson 1993: 367-369).

Thirdly, the task of re-appraisal of Islamic literature is related with the second question discussed above, that is to say how the world of comparison or allusion and reasoning should be incorporated in literary works. Since reasoning is almost related with comparison and allusion, i.e., the process of understanding something through its opposite, I would emphasize here comparison and allusion. There are two kinds of comparison or allusion proportionate with something being compared and discussed, be it virtue or vice. The two kinds of comparison is drawn upon in the Quran. An obvious example of vice comparison with vice is when Allah referred to kuffar *Ula'ika ka al-an'am bal hum adhal* (al-A'raf: 179) and the comparison of good deeds is that doing good deeds is likened to doing unending harvest.

The comparison of good deed with good allusion does not arouse question – rather it excites the readers and encourages them to do good. Interested to be questioned is the comparison of the bad with the bad or the worst, how far, it should be compromised. The question arises from the fact that Islam in its approach to expand its teachings stresses kindness and gentleness in verbalism and actions as can be seen in the Quranic verse: "Preach to the way of the way of your God (Allah) with wisdom and good reminding" (al-Nahl: 125).

There are several circumstances for comparison of the bad with the bad or worst being compromised. First circumstance is that when there is no comparison of the good for the bad. Second one is when the comparison target, i.e., the people a work has been written for it would not heed good reasoning or brush aside advice. Third and perhaps the last one is when truth is being so manipulated that society is misled or misinformed or when truth is no more regarded as the truth. What are to be concerned here are the last two situations. They are compelling reasons for the comparison of the bad with the worst. Since the target people would not try to understand the truth and

the society is misled or did not regard the true is the truth, there is no better comparison for the bad other than the bad itself. The good should be compared with the good. Prophet Muhammad's (s.a.w.) saying of the comparison of a sincere friend with somebody bringing with him perfume and of a bad friend with someone whose job is welding "*Mathaluth jalis salih ka mathali sahib mushakat...*" (al-Sabuni (n.d.): 32-35) should clarify the above matter of discussion. Someone bringing with him perfume, will indeed make others approaching him smelling good whereas the one whose job is welding will make anybody nearby stinking.

Thirdly and lastly, it should be incorporated in the re-conception of Islamic literature the idea that the boundary of Islamic literature must not be bound with reflections on something good or virtuous according to the Shari'ah. Islamic works should also discuss the bad side of contemporary developments of society. Muslim writers must not keep silent about *ma'siyat*, sins perpetrated by Muslims and they must be critical of them. It seems that present Muslim writers are laggards in tackling *ma'siyat* happening around them. Therefore, they must make the society aware of the *ma'siyat* and its consequences. This is another perspective of *da'wah* that can be delivered in literature and this need to be emphasized. Recently, Malaysian literary society became astonished by the eroticism of a novelette "TIVI" (1995) written by Shahnun Ahmad. The clamour in the local newspapers, *Berita Harian* and *Utusan* was over the "immoral" aspect of the work that some concerned literary scholars decried by arguing that it would sway young generation to doing bad deeds. The question should be approached regarding the novelette is that whether the work is so influential that it could turn young generation to doing *ma'siyat* such as *zina* – fornicating.

We should differentiate between a sensuous work calling the reader to perpetuate the *ma'siyat* and a work that put concern over the widespread of the *ma'siyat* and tries to tell the reader the *ma'siyat* is a *ma'siyat* that risks Allah's wrath and curse. Secondly, we should tell apart between a sensuous element which is common in Western and West-influenced works and between allusion to the bad thing or indirect mentioning of it. The question is how far allusion to sexuality is allowed in an Islamic work. In the work of "TIVI", we are told about the factors leading to the widespread of *ma'siyat* and its consequences, retributions from Allah. Lastly, we should bear in mind the difference between idolizing and chastising something bad and being cynical of it. In short, appreciation and satire are common practices of literary activity as literature is the image of an object. It is reflection – be they appreciation or sarcasm – of the writer over human conducts. The Muslim writer should deliver the message of Islam to society that the good is good, and the bad is bad and must be avoided. Having considered these points, the reader could judged "TIVI"

CONCLUSIONS

Having solved the confusion over matters related to Islamic literature, it can be surmised that an Islamic work must not be merely contemplative over the past and keeps lamenting the last failures. Instead, an Islamic work must be dynamic and critical of various developments of mankind. A Muslim writer shoulders the responsibility to disseminate Islamic teachings and Islamic codes of conduct through literary work. How complicated an Islamic work should be is determined by how sophisticated the intellectualism of a society is to which an Islamic work is devoted. Since many challenges of Western mainstream of literature is blocking the progress of Islamic literature and winning out its readership, Islamic concept of literature must be re-considered and improved in order to produce good, didactic and competitive works. The re-conception is imperative and has to be within the Islamic boundary. In addition, the concept of "other-ness", that is to appraise Islamic literature in comparison with other literature, should not be brushed aside as Muslim society communicates with non-Muslim society.

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