



## Journal of International Women's Studies

Volume 12

Issue 3 *Arab Women and Their Struggles for Socio-economic and Political Rights*

Article 9

Mar-2011

# Engaging Ancient Islamic Traditions in the Poetry of Saleha Ghabesh

Saddik M. Gohar

---

### Recommended Citation

Gohar, Saddik M. (2011). Engaging Ancient Islamic Traditions in the Poetry of Saleha Ghabesh. *Journal of International Women's Studies*, 12(3), 135-149.

Available at: <http://vc.bridgew.edu/jiws/vol12/iss3/9>

This item is available as part of Virtual Commons, the open-access institutional repository of Bridgewater State University, Bridgewater, Massachusetts.

## Engaging Ancient Islamic Traditions in the Poetry of Saleha Ghabesh

By Saddik M. Gohar<sup>1</sup>

### Abstract

This paper explores the integration of ancient Islamic heritage in Emirati literature, particularly the history of the rise and fall of the Muslim Empire in Andalusia, in an attempt to confront regional challenges and international transformations in the current era. Navigating the intersection between heritage and identity, the Emirati poet, Saleha Ghabesh, attempts to incorporate the ancient Islamic heritage in Andalusia as a dynamics of liberation in order to articulate domestic issues integral to the geopolitics of the United Arab Emirates and the Arab region in the age of globalization. Transforming the mythic history of Andalusia into a narrative of disclosure, the poet encounters a web of traditions and policies responsible for significant ramifications in the UAE and the Arab world. In a related context, the paper points out that the technique of adaptation, used by Ghabesh, which includes recollection rephrasing and re-writing of ancient heritage and Andalusian legacies to fulfill contemporary purposes, is part of the issue of hybridity and interculturalization, characterizing the contemporary experience of political and cultural globalization. By assimilating heritage and historical traditions into contemporary Emirati literature, Ghabesh aims to link the past with the present reconstructing ancient narratives which shaped the cultural mythology of the Arab people.

*Keywords:* Saleha Ghabesh, Islamic heritage, Emirati literature, Andalusia

### Introduction

Capturing the catastrophic history of the Arab world at present, Ghabesh<sup>2</sup> reconstructs episodes from the history of Islamic Andalusia engaging into inter-textual dialogues with ancient Andalusian poetry in which narratives of exile, defeat and subordination occupy the foreground. As a whole, Ghabesh's poetry examines reconsiderations of contemporary problems of domination and hegemony playing a conspicuously prominent role in the formation and dissemination of notions of reform, on the political and social paradigms. Serving as a potential signpost in Emirati cultural

---

<sup>1</sup> Saddik M. Gohar is an Associate Professor English Literature, at the United Arab Emirates University, UAE.

<sup>2</sup> Saleha Obeid Ghabesh is one of the most promising young poets and writers in the United Arab Emirates. As a poet and short story writer, she published several poetic anthologies and collections of short stories. Though she is not yet a popular poet in the sense that great numbers of people, in the Arab World, are familiar with her works, one could praise the poetry of Ghabesh for its thematic diversity, brilliant use of language, structural inventiveness and subtle depiction of Arab dreams and frustrations as well as its exploration of revolutionary feminist issues. In addition to its feminist perspective, the poetry of the female Emirati poet is imbued with lyricism and textual complexity that resist generic categorization. Besides an engagement with social and political issues, Ghabesh's poetry is characterized by its existential concerns and universal motifs which make it appealing to those interested in promulgating historical and universal pursuits.

criticism, and incorporating socio-political issues rooted in the collective consciousness of the Arab people, Ghabesh attempts to locate contemporary Emirati poetry in the context of current transformations in global relationships linking local cultural discourses with the intellectual concerns and orientations originating at the central sites of western literary canons.

On this basis, one of the central traits of Ghabesh's poetry is an extensive use of myth and legend, adapted and recycled to incorporate themes of contemporary significance in a modern Arab context. In the preface to her anthology, *Beman Ya Buthayn Taluthin? / Who will Secure a Safe Haven for Buthayn?*, she establishes an analogy between herself and Buthayn or Buthayna bint al-Mu'tamed Bin Abbad, the central female voice in the anthology. The links between the poet and her female persona are subtle and intricate to the extent that "they become one personality, one woman" (Ghabesh 2002: 5). Apparently, the Emirati poet is interested in the eventful life of her predecessor, Buthayna, because "the biography of this historical figure includes myth and tradition" according to Ghabesh. The life story of Buthayna, the Andalusian princess and the daughter of al-Mu'tamed b. Abbad<sup>3</sup>, the king of Seville (a city located in Southwestern Spain) is the central inspiration for the Emirati poet, who enthusiastically engages the historical narrative of her female predecessor in the poetic canvas of *Beman Ya Buthayn Taluthin?*

In *A Map of Misreading*, Harold Bloom considers the attempt to evade earlier writing produced by an author's predecessors as a basic motivation in literary production. In this context, Bloom illustrates that in order "to live the poet must misinterpret the father by the crucial act of misprision, which is the rewriting of the father" (Bloom 1975: 19). Unlike male Arab poets who reconstruct the texts of their forebears in order to dismantle them, Ghabesh rewrites her female predecessor integrating her poetic narrative into the contemporary literary canon. Ignoring Bloom's call for contemporary poets to "differentiate themselves into strength by trooping or turning from the presence of other poets" (Bloom 1975: 80), Ghabesh reveals no sign of anxiety toward her Andalusian forebear violating Bloom's paradigm of literary influence. In addition to her adaptation of the Andalusian narrative, to explore contemporary socio-political issues, the Emirati poet does not perform a textual dismemberment of her female Andalusian predecessor. Instead, she allows Buthayna to recur in the new contextual corpus. In other words, Ghabesh does not imply a privileged position for her own poetic

---

<sup>3</sup> During the Muslim occupation of Southern Spain (Andalusia) which lasted more than seven hundred years (755-1492), Arabo-Muslim rulers established several kingdoms which were subsequently dismantled after the restoration or the re-conquest of Spain. In the aftermath of the defeat of the Muslim armies and the loss of Andalusia, Buthayna's parents were exiled to Morocco, but the princess and the harem in her father's palace were sold out in slavery. Unaware of Buthayna's royal origin, a slave merchant from Seville gave her as a gift to his son, but she rejects to surrender her body to him. After the revelation of her identity and noble descent, Buthayna gained the admiration of her captor who, due to her beauty and virtues, proposes to her. Falling in love with him because of his kindness and respect for her, Buthayna accepts the engagement but refuses to consummate their marriage until she gets the consent of her father, the exiled king. But since Buthayna's decision to marry the young Spaniard is considered as an enormous transgression, which goes counter to the dictates of a patriarchal Muslim society, she decides to negotiate with her domineering father rather than to clash with him. Using her feminine powers of negotiation, she is able to gain the sympathy of her father who inevitably accepts her marriage from someone who belongs to the camp of the enemies.

discourse simply because Buthayna, the Andalusian princess or the dead narrator, reads Ghabesh as much as Ghabesh reads her.

Apparently, the major inspiration and the guiding light which came to the Emirati poet, from the history of Andalusia in general and from the story of Butayna in particular, shapes the infra poetic structure for her anthology linking the fall of Seville and Grenada with contemporary collapses and catastrophes on different fronts in the Arab world. The Emirati poet partly associates the loss of Arab glory in ancient Spain and in contemporary history to the domination of decadent patriarchal traditions, which subjugate Arab women, as well as other reasons. Searching for a savior-hero and struggling to save an entire history from oblivion, Ghabesh resurrects Andalusian mythology connecting the miserable end of al-Mu'tamed (king of Seville) with the potential destiny of contemporary Arab rulers engaged in Arab-Arab conflicts and guided by a masculine mentality, which breeds policies of oppression and leads to recurrent defeats. In other words, the young Emirati poet courageously interrupts contemporary patriarchal practices which confiscate female freedom disseminating her attitudes toward current issues of great importance in the social and political arenas.

Due to a deep concern with Andalusian history, Ghabesh's poetry borders on exploiting or colonizing Buthayna's narrative to fulfill ideological purposes. In this sense, Ghabesh's modern alternative discourse becomes a story within a story, and a new text is created and perpetuated, as the Emirati poet deploys her artistic vision using another woman's narrative. Through her engagement with Buthayna's legend, a woman's voice came to the Emirati poet from remote destination giving her poetry renewed vigor and sparking in the readers an interest in Andalusian history. Entering the text of the Emirati poet in several guises, Buthayna and her story are transformed into significant indicators and signifiers at the disposal of Ghabesh's poetic neologism and creativity. Functioning ultimately as a guarantee of Ghabesh's own voice, the story of Buthayna is reproduced in intellectual and political terms to deal with local and contemporary matters. Thus, Ghabesh's experience of reading Andalusian literature becomes "a catalyst", to use T.S. Eliot's term, prompting the Emirati poet to compose her own anthology in all its revolutionary and feminist implications and in its provocative and subversive treatment of a male-oriented tradition. In order to awaken the Arab people from "the long sleep of history", to use the words of the Syrian poet, Ali Ahmad Said (Adonis), she created an anguished portrayal of a nation on the verge of catastrophe. In this context, *Beman Ya Buthayn Taluthin?* becomes an appeal or a call for social and political reform in an era of desolation and collapse.

### **The Use of Myth in *Beman Ya Buthayn Taluthin?***

In his seminal study of the development of the mythic consciousness, Richard Slotkin describes mythology as follows:

A complex of narratives that dramatizes the world vision and historical sense of people or culture reducing centuries of experience into a constellation of compelling metaphors. Myth provides a scenario or prescription for action defining and limiting the possibilities for human response to the universe (Slotkin1973 :7) .

Slotkin equally argues that myth is the intelligible mask of that enigma called the national character. Slotkin also observes that throughout myths "the psychology and world view of our cultural ancestors are transmitted to modern descendants" (Slotkin 1973 :3). Further, Roland Barthes argues that "myth has the task of giving historical intentions a natural justification and making contingency appear eternal" (Barthes 1972 : 142). Explicitly, in modernist western tradition, the poet's artistic point of view is often formed by what is called "the mythic perspective". This mythic consciousness, according to Audrey Rodgers "conceives the world as unified, invisible and self-centered despite apparent contradictions in both the universe and the human affairs"<sup>4</sup> (cited in Gohar 1996: 41).

Moreover, the use of myth as a technique is central to advocates of modernism. For example, myth is incorporated in Eliot's poetic canon to fulfill different aesthetic purposes. Apparently, T.S. Eliot introduces "the mythic method"<sup>5</sup> as an alternative to nineteenth-century poetic forms because of his awareness that "the inherited modes of ordering a coherent and a stable socio-political order world can not accord with the great panorama of pessimism, futility and anarchy which is contemporary history" (cited in Gohar 1996: 28). For example, in "The Waste Land", a poem which profoundly influenced Arabic poetry, Eliot engages the mythical method instead of the narrative method in order to give coherence to the poem. Harry Levin argues that Eliot's use of myth is not confined to the premise of "juxtaposing past and present for comparative purposes" (Levin 1966: 290) but it aims to cut down unnecessary details integral to traditional poetic discourse. In other words, the incorporation of myth in modernist poetry is similar to the use of "images" for Imagists because in both cases the narrative structure is condensed and redundant details are eliminated.

In a related context, Derek Traversi illustrates that the mythic method is "a new way of structuring experience or projecting emotional material, by definition fragmented, with obvious connection of a casual kind, onto a containing framework" (Traversi 1976: 11). In the same context, Peter Faulkner admits that "the use of myth is one way in which the modernist writer has felt able to give coherence to his work. The myths often being of the most general kind, concerned with death, regeneration, the cycle of nature, the order of seasons" (Faulkner 1985: 18). Further, in postmodern criticism, myths are tales used to reinforce a master narrative by providing it with a veneer of "eternal truthfulness" which aims to overshadow the conflicts, contradictions and differences lying beneath the surface. Jean-Francois Lyotard categorizes these differences as "legitimizing narratives" (Lyotard 1991 : 19) .

Nevertheless, the myths used in Ghabesh's poetry are sophisticated, in the sense that they are not concerned with what Peter Faulkner calls "the cycle of nature", but they deal with the cycle of history. The Emirati poet's analogical use of myth is a way of approximating the relationship between past and present. Myth is used in an innovative

---

<sup>4</sup> For more details , see Audrey Rodgers "He Do the Police in Different Voices: The Design of the Waste Land" in T.S. Eliot's An Anthology of Recent Critics, ed. Tapan Kumar Basu. Delhi: Pencroft International, 1993.

<sup>5</sup> Arab poets take several modernist devices from Eliot's poetic canon particularly the mythic structure, the use of irony, free verse forms , the use of quotations , allusions to classical works and the use of citations from slogans , folklore and popular lyrics.

manner, in her poetry, to engage contemporary politics and patriarchal traditions. In this context, it is noteworthy to point out that the use of myth in literary texts is originally a modernist phenomenon, borrowed by Arab writers from western literature particularly the literary heritage of T.S. Eliot, to penetrate into the heart of contemporary reality. As a promising poet, Ghabesh is able to appropriate myth redefining and extending it to include more cultural spaces. Further, the use of myth in her poetry has an ontological function that transcends poetic language.

In her famous anthology *Who Will Secure a Safe Haven for Buthayn<sup>6</sup>?/ Beman Ya Buthayan Taluthin ?*, Ghabesh reconstructs Andalusian mythology as a metaphor for contemporary reality in the Arab world calling for revolution and reform. Adapting the Andalusian legend to serve current issues, she reveals a growing consciousness of herself as a female subaltern and a rebel. This notion manifests itself as an undercurrent of opposition to contemporary Arab politics and traditions. Though her poetry is rooted in Andalusian myth, it has its own flavor and every poem speaks for itself:

To read a poem is not to read not yet another poem, it is not even to enter, via this poem, into the essence of poetry. The reading of the poem is the poem itself, affirming itself in the reading as a work. It is the giving birth, in the space held open by the reader, to the reading that welcomes it (Blanchot 1982: 198).

In *Beman Ya Buthayn Taluthin?*, Saleha Ghabesh started her journey toward a politico-feminist committed poetry. Her radical critique of modern Arab politics acquires sharp focus particularly in her poem "Those Who Entered / *al-Dakhelun* ", dedicated to, Abdul-Rahman al-Dakhel (known as Saqr Quraish<sup>7</sup>). Obviously, the current political situation in the Arab world enhanced the poet's awareness of the negative role of Arab politicians. In its candid denunciation of hegemonic politics Ghabesh's poetry may seem at odds with and contradictory to conservative patriarchal traditions, however, it remains a valid focus for contemporary cultural and critical practices. Incorporating western

---

<sup>6</sup> In *Beman Ya Buthayn Taluthin?*, the medieval narrative of Buthayn or Buthayna , the Andalusian princess and her eventful life story constitute the cultural / mythic background of the anthology in addition to the life-history of the Umayyad prince Abdul-Rahman al-Dakhel ( known as Saqr Quraish or The Hawk of Quraish ). The links between the poet and her female persona ( Buthayn ) are subtle and intricate to the extent that "they become one personality, one woman". See the poet's preface to *Beman Ya Buthayn Taluthin ?* pp. 5-9.

<sup>7</sup> His name is Abdul-Rahman b. Mua'wiyya b. Hisham b. Abdul-Malek, known as Saqr Quraish (The Hawk of Quraish) - Quraish is a famous Arab tribe in Mecca. He escaped from the Abbasid persecution of the Umayyad family in Damascus and was able to establish an Islamic dynasty in Andalusia (756-788). After the fall of the Umayyad Empire, the Abbasid army slaughtered all the members of the Umayyad royal family but Abdul-Rahman was able to hide in a Syrian village, near the Euphrates river. In the beginning of his escape adventure, he went to al-Qairawan city – in North Africa - when he was nineteen years old. But he failed to stay there because the enemies of the Umayyads (the Kharijites / al-Khawarej) attempted to assassinate him , therefore he went to Libya and stayed there for four years. In 755, he led an army crossing the Atlantic and invading Seville. After the invasion of Seville, he conquered Cordoba and declared himself Caliph of the Muslim nation in Andalusia at the age of 26. Abdul-Rahman , supported by the Berbers in Andalusia, was engaged into wars and armed struggle with other Muslim factions in an attempt to dominate the Spanish South.

aesthetic strategies, the poet's narratives do not appear in chronological sequences but in fragmented structures, a reflection of modernist techniques characterizing Eliot's poetry. Moreover, in *Beman Ya Buthayn Taluthin?*, Andalusian traditions are transformed into a narrative of confrontation and protest challenging the obliteration of the feminized memory in the labyrinth of patriarchal culture. Fueled primarily by the agitation resulting from disappointing confrontations with a hegemonic tradition, Ghabesh expresses support for the advocates of progress against the forces of bigotry and aggression.

Recalling the history of Arabic-Muslim dynasties in Andalusia and establishing links with a heroic historical tradition, Ghabesh breaks new territory searching for a mythic figure able to liberate the Arab consciousness from the chains of ignorance and superstitions. She draws from the generative mythic history of Abdul Rahman al-Dakhel (the Hawk of Quraish). Historically, the Arab / Andalusian prince, was able to survive the Abbasid genocide of his kinsmen (the Umayyad family) after the collapse of their dynasty in Damascus in the eighth century. Escaping from the Abbasid holocaust, Abdul-Rahman crossed the Atlantic to southern Spain where he put the foundations of a great empire which lasted for more than seven centuries (755-1492). In her magnificent poem, "Those Who Entered / *al-Dakhelun*", Ghabesh laments the loss of Andalusia (the reconquest of Spain) in the fifteenth-century alluding to the potential loss of more Arab empires and countries in modern history:

The pioneers came back  
with their sorrows and dreams .  
like strangers, they walk barefooted  
escaping toward unknown lands (Ghabesh 2002 : 23<sup>8</sup>).

In her anguish, the poet addresses the Hawk of Quraish capturing the wounds of a nation crippled by recurrent humiliations and defeats. The poet searches for a modern Arab Prometheus who, despite being burnt to ashes, will rise again like a phoenix bringing rebirth to the entire Arab nation. The burning process, in mythical terms, is a purifying ritual crucial to the process of resurrection and salvation. Within the symbolic structure of the poem, a modern Arab savior is expected to sweep away a withered and decayed tradition paving the way for salvation and redemption:

Will you come late? or arrive on time  
to climb the vertical horse  
and open the windows for sunshine.  
the sun has been waiting for you.  
the sun gracefully runs toward the west  
hiding herself behind the horizon  
like a girl repeatedly conceals  
her story by the end of the day.  
the sun piously prays in her altar  
for the sake of the Hawk

---

<sup>8</sup> All translations from Arabic sources including *Beman Ya Buthayn Taluthin ?* is done by the author of the article. Further, all the initiating and pioneering critical studies on the anthology (*Beman Ya Buthayn Taluthin?*) - in both English and Arabic languages - are so far the contributions of the author.

in order to awaken him  
from the rebellious absurdity  
of his dreams (Ghabesh 2002 : 24).

Falling in love with the Hawk of Quraish and equating the heroic sacrifices of the Andalusian prince with the selfishness and opportunism of contemporary Arab politicians and rulers, Ghabesh's female persona searches for him everywhere:

The girl will trace your track,  
will recognize you,  
a veiled warrior behind the dust,  
on the back of a horse  
infiltrating through the barriers of mirage.  
how can she meet you  
after her dressmakers throw away  
her royal gown and escape?  
how can she meet you  
after the death of her hairdresser?  
how can she meet you  
while autumn is penetrating  
the locks of her hair?  
will you come late or arrive on time? (Ghabesh 2002 : 24).

In her attempt to revitalize a decadent tradition and build a new Andalusia, Ghabesh denounces contemporary Arab politics which leads to catastrophes and misery. Drawing inspiration from the lessons of the past and filling the earth "with the screams of new things", to use the words of Adonis, the great Syrian poet, she challenges the corruption of the present. In an Eliotic manner, Ghabesh juxtaposes the heroic history of the Hawk to the clandestine and shameful policies of defeated Arab rulers:

Do not be like them.  
bring me a dowry of dignity.  
I have been waiting for you  
for fifty years.  
my dowry is lost  
under heaps of defeats.  
bring back my dowry  
through a victory over  
the carriers of scriptures and lies  
using a sword that sheds its dust  
and a roaring speech,  
a declaration of the holy war.  
rise up, do not be like them  
and bring my dowry,  
my beloved Jerusalem  
and say to me:



darling, we become victorious.  
does your Arab heart stay in peace now? (Ghabesh 2002 : 25).

To Eliot, a poet can be evaluated only in connection with his / her involvement in tradition and through his / her relationship with the great literary ancestors and forebears: "His [her] appreciation is the appreciation of his [her] relation to the dead poets and artists" (Eliot 1972: 72). Harold Bloom argues, in *A Map of Misreading*, that poets "differentiate themselves into strength by trapping or turning from the presence of other poets" (Bloom 1975: 80). By integrating the poetic traditions of western poets like Eliot and Pound, Ghabesh shows no signs of anxiety toward her western forebears violating Bloom's paradigm of literary influence.

In "Those Who Departed in their Darkness / *al-Rahelun fi Atamatehem*", she identifies herself with Buthayna, the Andalusian princess and the beloved daughter of the defeated and exiled king of Seville : " both of us appear in an unfamiliar and warm identity / hostile to collective conscience / thus, innocence is transformed into sharp blades mutilating the moment of appearance" (Ghabesh 2002 : 21). Furthermore, Ghabesh speaks about a world where nothing exists except the ghosts of inevitable defeats and "where we become again a comedy for our dreams" (Ghabesh 2002 : 22).

In "She Ran Away / *Fa Kharajat Harebah*", Ghabesh visualizes an encounter between Buthayna, the poet's female persona and the Hawk of Quraish. The female persona longs for a savior to emerge and set things in order but nothing happens. When she becomes on the verge of disappointment and collapse,

you (the hawk) appear  
to wash the face of Buthayna  
and remove the dust of waiting  
from her face.  
you appear  
to break the clock of pain  
hanging on her walls.  
you appear  
to mingle your voice with hers  
spreading your cloak  
over my letters  
exposed to the intruding eyes  
at the moment of collapse (Ghabesh 2002 : 32-33).

Apostrophizing the Hawk (Abdul-Rahman al-Dakhel), the female speaker continues her one-sided dialogue with him:

carrying your sadness,  
I will travel toward  
villages where girls are  
dancing in their feasts.  
they turn their sorrows  
into black hair plaits

as dark as the night (Ghabesh 2002 : 34).

At the end of her passionate address to the Hawk, Ghabesh utilizes subtle and suggestive utterances reflecting her talent as a promising young poet:

Have you ever known  
that you are the essence  
of my lost things?  
I appear in your utterances  
on your lips and in your words  
when invited by my silence (Ghabesh 2002 : 35).

In “Thus, time Passed Away / *Wa Hakatha al-Zaman Ya`ul*”, Ghabesh engages current geopolitics evoking contemporary conditions in the Arab world and calling for an abandonment “of our weakness / and our hollow speech” (Ghabesh 2002 : 28). “Searching for olives and orange trees, in the Arab world”, the poet dreams of a better future where she can fly like “a sparrow at the break of the dawn” to enjoy “the taste of freedom” (Ghabesh 2002 : 29). In her poem, “Weep Like Women / *Ebki Kannesa`a*”, addressed to al-Mu’tamed bin Abbad , king of Seville during the medieval era, the Emirati poet says:

Shuddering under the windows  
of a palace visited by the fever of defeat  
since you were under siege  
surrounded by the spears of your hands.  
give me the key of your palace  
before the arrival of its guards,  
before the arrival of the carriers of bells  
who may bring with them  
some peace and warmth  
brought from my homeland in the East (Ghabesh 2002 : 49).

Lamenting the defeat of the Arabs in Spain and the collapse of their Islamic empire including the kingdom of al-Mu’tamed, the poet addresses the exiled king in poetic lines<sup>9</sup> saying:

All the kings burst into tears,  
and you were the last one to weep  
bowing your head,  
shedding your tears  
and the jewels of your crown  
on the floor of the miserable palace

---

<sup>9</sup> King al-Mu’tamed himself was interested in poetry and he was an eloquent poet. He partly fell in love with Buthayna’s mother ( E’etamad al-Rumaykiyya) who was originally a slave girl because she wrote wonderful poetry .

which turns upside down  
due to our death,  
appealing to the royal partners  
in your Kingdom to be united  
even in memories and tears,  
but all of them deserted you  
leaving you alone, the remains of a king.  
do not weep like women  
it is your destiny to confront  
a woman killed by inherited sins  
wrapped in dusty boxes (Ghabesh 2002 : 50).

The poem ends with a note of grief and lamentation over a lost paradise and a glorious past that can never be regained:

I love you Andalusia.  
your love is the story of the people.  
I am their daughter.  
one night, they abandoned you ,  
but your broken and exhausted name remains  
embroidered with your running blood (Ghabesh 2002 : 51).

Explicitly, Ghabesh's poetry, in *Beman Ya Buthayn Taluthin?*, fits into Roland Barthes' view of the literary text as a network composed of "multiple writings" which come from a variety of sources and discourses already in circulation in some form or other. Nevertheless, Barthes' perspective of the author / poet, as a synthesizer who deliberately reworks and echoes other texts, does not literally apply to Ghabesh's poetry because the Emirati poet transforms ancient history to fit contemporary purposes. By drawing on medieval Andalusian sources, Ghabesh incorporates ancient narratives and myths which keep recurring in her poetry in their original shape and in modified forms. The use of the myth of the Hawk of Quraish is an indication of this trend as variants of it keep appearing in Ghabesh's poetry. The use of Andalusian historical narratives in *Beman Ya Buthayn Taluthin?* also reveals trajectories of deeply rooted traditions integral to contemporary Emirati poetry. On this basis, it is significant to argue that Ghabesh's anthology, like any other poetic text, "is a new tissue of past citations" (Barthes 1972:97). Nevertheless, *Beman Ya Buthayn Taluthin?* could be seen as a kind of discursive recycling where the new relations - which come to exist between the discourses - appropriated and incorporated into her poetry emphasizing that literary writing is never the same. In Ghabesh's poetry, there are sets of cross-references and allusions which provide a richer reading experience or to use modern critical jargon: the signifiers in the text evoke more complex signification. In this sense, Ghabesh attempts to orchestrate Andalusian symbols and myths in a way that suits her contemporary context. Further, her poetry becomes an illustration of a self-conscious recognition of the lessons drawn from the history of the Muslim Empire in Andalusia. Consequently, Ghabesh's poetic text is transformed into a self-consciously re-construction of Andalusian discourses incorporated in a different cultural environment and located in a different frame of reference and myth.

Traditionally, myth has been utilized as a medium to deploy ideas or attitudes and thematize issues of enormous significance. Incorporating the first grains of human rationality, which provides a systematic model of logic capable of over-coming contradiction, myth is extensively engaged in modernist literature. Therefore, Ghabesh deals with myth as an archetype and a mask to navigate current issues. Utilizing myth as an archetype, rooted in human heritage and as an imaginative space of comprehension, she allegorizes its content to serve serious poetic purposes. Moreover, the Emirati poet utilizes myth as a mask to probe deeply into Arabic-Islamic history confronting contemporary challenges and transcending potential obstacles. In “The Threads of the Spinning Mills / *Khuyut al-Maghazel*”, Ghabesh invokes Buthayna from her Andalusian refuge juxtaposing the present to the past weaving a poetics of nostalgia and pain:

Oh, Buthayna  
who will secure a safe haven for you?  
the night is a long spear,  
and Jamil, your lover, is drunk  
dragging his feet on the roof  
unable to reach you.  
when he arrives, he will be  
followed by a thousand stories (Ghabesh 2002 : 40).

Apparently, the reference to Jamil recalls the pre-medieval Arabian folklore narrative about the historical love story of Jamil, a Bedouin warrior / poet and Buthayna, a beautiful girl, from Arabia. The triangular relationship, between Buthayna (the Andalusian princess) and the Buthayna of Arabia (the beloved of Jamil) as well as Saleha Ghabesh (the modern Emirati Buthayna) provides more insight into the feminist and historical nature of the poem. The miserable depiction of Jamil, as a drunk and hopeless lover who drags “his feet on the roof unable to reach you”, is an indication of the loss of manhood and the dominance of impotency in a world on the verge of moral collapse. The reference to the historical figure of Jamil - who in reality was ready to sacrifice himself for the sake of his mistress - aims to foreground the impotency of contemporary Arab males unable to restore the dignity of their beloved Palestine, conquered by invaders. Moreover, the link between the fall of Andalusia and the occupation of Palestine and the connection between Andalusian history and Arabian folklore heritage enriched the text of the poem integrating it into the great tradition of Arabic poetry:

since twenty years,  
the pigeons have been lying  
in my notebook,  
when I started to read  
my flaming words  
under the light of legitimate letters  
but the pigeons fled away.  
Like other girls, she dreams of  
the rainbow and how it changes  
its colors after the departure of rain (Ghabesh 2002 : 41) .

Obviously, the history of the Islamic Empire in Andalusia had a tremendous impact on the Emirati poet, who attempts to grasp the new transformation in the Arab world during an era of catastrophes and global ramifications. Seeking solace in Andalusian narratives, Ghabesh attempts to redefine the Arabic cultural tradition by persuading Arab rulers to draw lessons from ancient history. Responding to the intellectual and political challenges of a new era, she depicts a society moving toward enormous transformation brought about by a developing economy and a modernizing cultural apparatus. Assuming that the new developments in her local society, and the Arabian Gulf region, would lead to either rebirth or disaster, the Emirati poet captures Andalusian history which provides her with a new vision through a related concern with narratives of defeat and victory, death and rebirth. The ties between the discourse deployed in *Beman Ya Buthayn Taluthin?* and the traditions rooted in ancient Islamic history in Spain, is significant due to their involvement in cultural rather than personal rejuvenation.

In a poem titled “the Perfume of al-Rumaykiyyah / *Mesk al-Rumaykiyyah*”, addressed to Buthayna's mother (E'etamad al-Rumaykiyyah) and the beloved wife of the exiled king of Seville (al-Mutamed), Ghabesh states:

she sees herself as a hostage of a dream  
and a differed song, adjourned  
until the pigeons are awoken,  
broken by long waiting,  
and driven by sorrows during the journeys  
of those who departed,  
but her pen is not broken,  
and its warm words entered into  
a dialogue with the perfumed roads,  
here, your dream boy will arrive  
to give you, his promised legacy,  
a rose perfuming the palm of your hand (Ghabesh 2002 : 53).

In a romantic and nostalgic manner, the poet continues her narrative searching for an Arab savior, a modern Hawk, who

will give you  
the perfume of al-Rumaykiyyah  
a hostage in the mud of exiles.  
he will set fire in words  
and your poem comes to an end  
when you write his name  
and a dedication of your soul  
to him (Ghabesh 2002 : 54).

There is no doubt that Ghabash's sense of tradition and her interest in the richness of ancient Islamic history found expression in the profusion of echoes from Andalusian poetry. The tradition of acquiring the work of other writers, reworking, mixing and merging narratives from other cultures liberated Ghabash's poetry from the worn-out forms of classical Arabic poetry. Due to her innovations in creating new musical resonances and echoes, she is able to open new horizons for the Arabic poem in the United Arab Emirates pushing her poetry further than her consciousness could follow.

Furthermore, Ghabash's use of the mythical method directly involves, through brief allusions, historical narratives avoiding lengthy recitals of events in the previous poem. Her use of myth is not confined to the premise of "juxtaposing past and present for comparative purposes" (Levin 1966: 290), but it aims to cut down unnecessary details integral to traditional poetic discourse. Ghabash's poetry is characterized by an increasing use of tradition and myth. Besides, allusions to historical personae, such as Saqr Quraish and Buthayna bent al-Mu'tamed, are incorporated in her poetry and other cultural symbols and legends are reshaped to engage themes of contemporary significance. In other words, the life history of ancient Islamic figures are used as objective correlatives to depersonalize the poetic discourse of *Beman Ya Buthayn Taluthin?* In her attempt to hybridize modern Emirati literature, isolated in a cultural limbo between tradition and modernity since the 1970's, Ghabash recalls episodes from the ancient Islamic history in Andalusia. On this basis, her poetic text, to use Michael Foucault's words, "is caught up in a system of references to other books, other texts, other sentences" (cited in Gohar 1996: 38).

In a poem titled, "Oriental Woman / *Sharqiyyah*", the Emirati poet underlines her dedication to the East regardless of the degrading status of women in this part of the world. Throughout the words of her persona, she urges oriental women to rebel against oppressive patriarchal traditions and hostile masculine practices because they are "the pearls and the dreams of the East":

you refuse to be an oriental woman,  
but you are the sea, the coast,  
the pearls and the dream of the East  
in the eyes of the passersby  
standing at the crossroads  
of the ruined cities.  
your voice is the remedy  
for their desolation and loneliness (Ghabesh 2002 : 43).

Regardless of the pessimism and disappointing atmosphere of her poetry, Ghabash ends her poem, cited above, with a note of hope. She encourages every Buthayna, every girl of her generation, to help her Jamil overcome his impotency and lack of manhood : "Somewhere in the East, you call him : Jamil, Jamil / the honey-like beauty of your Buthayna / is created by the bees of your desolate separation / Jamil, come back before / the season of salt sets up the traps for your ghosts" (Ghabesh 2002 :49).

## Conclusion

Ghabesh's poetic discourse, in *Beman Ya Buthayn Taluthin*, illustrates the frustration of the poet and her isolation in the labyrinth of a defeated patriarchal world. Several poems, in the anthology, deal with the theme of frustration and failed relationships. Moreover, the figures that appeared in the poems are utilized as objective correlatives reflecting, in unbiased manner, the emotions the poet wants to express. Though Ghabesh's poems are replete with human figures, they are empty of human life. In this sense, they become an expression of the isolation of a single soul turning away from life and driven on its own quest. Agitated by policies of corruption and marginalization, deeply at odds with the modern concept of equality, freedom and democracy, Ghabesh considers the current situation in the Arab region as an epitome of the negligence of dictatorial regimes. Her deliberate reworking of Andalusian history aims to criticize regimes notorious for autocratic, irresponsible and unaccountable behavior toward their citizens. Castigating forces that defend corrupt regimes while leaving the civil society vulnerable in confrontation with militant / religious organizations, Ghabesh confronts forces of bigotry and aggression while supporting the pioneers of progress and enlightenment.

Since texts resist simple clear-cut interpretations, Ghabesh's poetic discourse in *Beman Ya Buthayn Taluthin?*, is revelation of intersections of motifs, narratives and myths integral to the Islamic literary tradition in Andulasia (ancient Spain). In her anthology, Ghabesh aesthetically transforms Andalusian history into a contemporary poetic construct incorporating Andalusian literature as inter-text, to explore political and social issues of great significance. A scrutinized reading of Ghabesh's poetry provides an entry into her appropriation of Andalusian cultural heritage as a vehicle to express the dilemma of contemporary Arab history. Reflecting a range of trans-textual relationships with Andalusian culture, and highlighting significant thematic parallels, which link the past with the present, Ghabesh creates a hybridized poetics deeply rooted in classical traditions. Reshaping Andalusian historical narratives into a revolutionary dynamics, the Emirati poet attempts to develop a counter feminized mechanism to subvert a decadent patriarchal culture which drags the Arab world backward toward the Stone Age. Further, in her poetry, Ghabesh attributes contemporary deterioration and recurrent political defeats, integral to modern Arab history, to the same hegemonic system which gives birth to the Arab patriarchal tradition.

Moreover, the female speaker, in *Beman Ya Buthayn Taluthin?*, typifies the spirit of frustration and nostalgia associated with Arab intellectuals at times of crisis and decadence. Disappointed by the current condition of backwardness dominating the Arab world, the speaker expresses a deep sense of nostalgia for a glorious past that is lost forever. This spirit is triggered by painful cultural and political developments provoking an awareness of death and chaos rooted in contemporary Arab civilization. The central female speaker in the anthology – who represents the consciousness of the Emirati poet – is cut off from the ethics of a society torn to pieces due to international hegemony and local disintegration. Her Arabic culture, shaken by colonization, warfare, corruption and the dissolution of old ideals, does not protect her from isolation or the constant awareness of frustration.

Living in this cultural limbo, Ghabesh's female speaker is suspended between past and present, between pain and the desire for consolation. Turning her back on the defeats and catastrophes of contemporary Arab history, the speaker voluntarily starts an imaginary journey into the glories of Islamic Andalusia for spiritual and aesthetic purposes recalling the mythic history of Saqr Quraish. In this sense, Ghabesh's anthology presents the consciousness of one who yearns for an ideal world that is contradicted with contemporary reality. Thus, the Emirati poet attempts to inspire her readers to see the wide distinctions between the glories of the past and the disappointments of the present revealing an immense ability to bring together complex and desperate elements subordinating them to achieve her aesthetic purposes. Preoccupied with tradition and convinced that poets are the interpreters of history, Ghabesh incorporates in *Beman Ya Buthayn Taluthin?* echoes of the great poetry of other cultures and times.

## References

---

- Barthes, Roland. "Myth Today". *Mythologies 1957*, trans. Annette Lavers. New York: Farrar Straus and Giroux, 1972. PP. 109-159.
- Blanchot, Maurice. *The Space of Literature*, trans. Ann Smock. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1982.
- Bloom, Harold. *A Map of Misreading*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1975.
- Eliot, T.S. "Tradition and Individual Talent", in *Twentieth Century Literary Criticism*, ed. David Lodge. London: Longman, 1972. PP. 71-77.
- Faulkner, Peter. *Modernism*. New York: Methuen, 1985.
- Ghabesh, Saleha. *Beman Ya Buthayn Taluthin? / Who Will Secure a Safe Haven for Buthayn?* Sharjah, UAE: Culture and Media Department Press, 2002.
- Gohar, Saddik. *The Waste Land: An Arab Perspective*. (Arabic) Uyoon Press, Cairo: 1996.
- Levin, Harry. "What was Modernism?" in *Refractions: Essays in Comparative Literature*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1966. PP. 271-295.
- Liotard, Jean-Francois. *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge*, trans. Geoff Bennington and Brian Massumi. Minneapolis : University of Minnesota Press, 1991.
- Slotkin, Richard. *Regeneration Through Violence: the Mythology of the American Frontier, 1600-1860*. Middletown, CT. : Wesleyan university press, 1973 .
- Traversi, Derek. *T.S. Eliot: the Longer Poems*. New York: Harcourt Brace, Jovanovich, 1976.