

ARAB CAUSES IN THE FICTION OF

GHĀDAH AL-SAMMĀN,

1961-1975

By



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THIS THESIS IS
RESPECTFULLY DEDICATED TO
MY PARENTS
WITH LOVE AND APPRECIATION

ABSTRACT

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The present work is a study of Arab causes or issues in the fiction of Ghādah al-Sammān, a Syrian woman writer who has lived most of her literary life in Beirut, Lebanon. The period of al-Sammān's literary career which will be investigated in this study essentially extends from 1961 through the Six-day War of 1967 to the Lebanese Civil War in 1975.

Al-Sammān is in some ways a typical revolutionary modern Arab woman. She is daring and rebellious and engaged in a continuous struggle with the religious and social traditions of her society. Through her many portrayals of the Arab individual--male and female--al-Sammān has succeeded in depicting with harsh realism the many problems that beset Arab society. The stage is Beirut and the characters are individuals who embody all the conflicts

of their society: its civil strife, sectarian conflicts and class struggles.

The issue of women's liberation is closely interwoven with social criticism in al-Sammān's fiction and will, therefore, be one of the main themes of our analysis. To the extent that al-Sammān often deals with these important issues under the influence of Western philosophies, especially French existentialism, her treatment remains alien to the Arab issues she deals with, as will be borne out in the course of our investigation. This will be particularly clear in the case of the issue of women's liberation.

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Cette thèse est une étude des causes ou questions arabes dans la fiction de Ghādah al-Sammān, une écrivaine d'origine syrienne qui a passé la grande partie de sa vie littéraire à Beyrouth, Liban. La période étudiée ici sera limitée à ses publications de 1961 jusqu'à la guerre civile du Liban en 1975, y compris l'évènement tournant qu'était la guerre de six jours de 1967.

Al-Sammān est, de plusieurs aspects, une femme arabe moderne révolutionnaire typique. Elle est courageuse et rebelle, engagée dans une lutte continuelle avec les traditions religieuses et sociales de sa société. Al-Sammān a tracé nombre de personnages individuels arabes, hommes et femmes, et ainsi a réussi à dépeindre avec réalisme brutale les problèmes multiples de la société arabe. L'action se déroule à Beyrouth et les personnages sont des individus

qui représentent tous les conflits de leur société: la guerre civile, les conflits sectaires et les luttes de classes.

Le problème de la libération de la femme est intimement lié dans les écrits de Ghādah al-Sammān à sa critique sociale et sera ainsi l'une des thèmes de notre analyse. Néanmoins, à mesure que souvent elle traite ces questions importantes à partir de philosophies occidentales, particulièrement l'existentialisme français, sa présentation paraît étrangère aux questions arabes comme sera démontré au cours de notre étude. Cette observation est particulièrement claire pour le cas de son traitement du problème de la libération de la femme.

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Hanan A. Awwad

PREFACE

In the late 1940's certain events took place which had a great impact on the Arab world, the most important of which were the establishment of the state of Israel in Palestine, the subsequent socio-political upheaval in the Middle East, and the increasing influence of Western culture on the Levantine people.

Almost twenty years later, the 1967 defeat of the Arabs by the Israelis had a further and greater impact that was reflected in the literature of most Arab writers, male and female. This appeared clearly in their short stories and novels as well as in their poetry. The Arab defeat consolidated the intellectual and emotional objectives of the Arab writers in Syria, Egypt, Lebanon, Palestine, Iraq and North Africa, and gave them a stronger voice to speak out on Arab affairs despite ideological differences. The Arab writers were pressed to question and write about the causes of the defeat which were among the topics of their utmost concern.

One of the most outspoken literary figures to emerge in this period has been Ghādah al-Sammān. She addressed the problems that beset the contemporary Arabs, with particular attention to the concerns of Arab women. She treated such topics as women's emancipation, social

stratification, and love of the homeland. In addition, she wrote on the different ideological, religious, and political problems of the Arabs in general, and those of the Lebanese and the Palestinians in particular.

From the foregoing, one can clearly see the difficulties of attempting to study a writer like al-Sammān. Firstly, she is a young writer and is still publishing; to make the study manageable I will confine it to her literary works published in the period extending from her first publication in 1961 to the end of 1975. Secondly, her topics are so broad that to write on all of them would make this study unnecessarily lengthy, and thus I have chosen to limit my work to the treatment of Arab causes in her fiction. Thirdly, al-Sammān writes on various issues in different literary genres such as short stories, novels, articles, and other genres that are difficult to classify, but I will limit my investigation to her fictional works.

For the purpose of this study al-Sammān's works may be divided into two distinct periods: (1) the period before the defeat of the Arabs, i.e., pre-1967, and (2) the period after it, up to 1975. One important point that we must take note of in this categorization, however, is the fact that some of her works published after the 1967 defeat were actually written before it, such as

al-A'māl ghayr al-Kāmilah (The Incomplete Works), which is a series of volumes reflecting a variety of literary expressions. With this in mind, my study will examine her short stories and novels within the above-noted periods; but her "incomplete works" will be generally referred to only inasmuch as they relate to her fiction within the period of our investigation. Similarly, my brief treatment of her fiction since 1975 will not be more than a general survey with the aim of placing it within the total context of her literary production.

Since al-Sammān has become the spokesperson for women as a writer concerned with women's issues, I have considered it to be pertinent to refer briefly in my study to the writings on women's issues in the period before her. This was when the quality and the perspective of literary works by women were so distinctly female that they were referred to as "women's literature." As an additional note on the scope of this study, it must be observed that no previous study of al-Sammān's works has been undertaken on a full scale. This of course makes my work by necessity largely original because there is no comprehensive study to refer to either as a source or as a subject of criticism. Finally, I shall attempt to determine al-Sammān's contribution to contemporary Arabic literature.

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

In many parts of the Arab world, the dominance of Muslim culture and traditional values has been partially responsible for the slow growth of women's literary movement. The existence of such forces has, to a large extent, influenced women's writings and imposed considerable restrictions on women's freedom within the social framework of Arab society. Arab traditions dictate a secondary role for women in society, limiting their duties to housekeeping, childbearing, and a very few social activities. In addition, since their early childhood girls are made to live with the fear of losing their virginity, which is traditionally kept until marriage and symbolizes the honour and dignity of the family. This, in turn, has subjected the girl to close supervision by her father, brothers, and other male relatives who maintain a strict watch over all her relations, especially those with the opposite sex. Having been subjected to such restrictions, women have not been given an adequate opportunity to share the benefits of the socio-economic changes that have occurred over the past few decades in different parts of the Arab world.

The current lifestyle, brought by these political,

social, and economic changes in society since the Second World War, has undoubtedly made substantial contributions to the rise of women's voices against the rigidity of the social structure, and hence their demand for greater social freedom. Many Arab writers, including Ghādah al-Sammān, have characterized women's position in the Arab world as one involving several dimensions of oppression and deprivation with regard to such things as education, child-bearing, virginity, and sexual loyalty, and in relations with male authorities--husbands, fathers, brothers, etc.

The voices of women began to be heard in certain parts of the Arab world in the latter part of the nineteenth century. With the appearance of essays, stories, poetry, and articles on women's concerns in various magazines and newspapers, the women's literary movement made a start. Writers of note during this period were: Wardah al-Yāzījī (1838-1924)¹, Zaynab Fawwāz (1850-1914)², Labībah Hāshim (1882-1952)³, 'Afīfah Karam (1883-1925)⁴, Julia Ṭu'mah Dimashqīyah (1880-1954)⁵, Salmā Ṣāyigh (1889-1953)⁶, and Hanā Kāsbānī Kūrānī (1870-1898).⁷ These writers paved the way for the next generation of women writers, allowing them to take part in the development of the women's literary movement in which journalism played an important role as it made their names more widely known. Since the

early part of this century, other women writers have appeared, showing even greater motivation and courage in discussing women's issues. Among this group are Bāḥithat al-Bādiyah or Malak Ḥifnī Nāṣif (1886-1918)⁸ and Mayy Ziyādah (1886-1941).⁹

The articles of Bāḥithat al-Bādiyah began to appear in al-Jarīdah newspaper in Cairo as early as 1907. In 1911, she published her book entitled al-Nisā' iyyāt (Feminist Essays),¹⁰ which is a collection of several of her articles about prominent women in the Middle East. This book is regarded by many as an important step in the field of modern literature in the Arab world. Mayy Ziyādah, in particular, admired the book and as a result, wrote a biographical study of the life and works of Bāḥithat al-Bādiyah.¹¹ In her letters to Bāḥithat al-Bādiyah, Ziyādah gives encouragement and support to the writer in defending women's rights. In one of her letters, she says:

The days pass and we [women] are still in magnified confusion. Man struggles in an economic war, he busies himself with many undertakings. When he wants to write literature, he does not reach the level of women's sentiments, for he writes from the viewpoint of his egoistic thinking and hard-heartedness whereas the woman enlivens her mind, emotions and passion.¹²

She then continues, calling on Bāḥithat al-Bādiyah to

unite with those people who attempt to elevate this generation from perplexity and hesitation, asking her to help them to liberate women by making them aware of their social responsibilities.¹³

The writings of Mayy Ziyādah herself during this period are also considered an important step in women's literature and the call for freedom. Born in Nazareth of a Lebanese father and Palestinian mother in 1886,¹⁴ Ziyādah attended 'Aynṭūrah school from 1899 to 1904, having completed her elementary education at Nazareth. Thereafter, she moved with her family to Cairo where she started composing poetry and prose in French, travelling often between Egypt and Lebanon. Meanwhile, in 1911, she published her first book, Fleurs de Rêve, a collection of poems in French. She wrote it under the pseudonym of Isis Copia, while the Arabic translation Azāhīr Ḥulm was published posthumously under her real name.¹⁵ The reason for the pseudonym was her anticipation of a negative response from the public.¹⁶ After the success of her first publication, she revealed her identity and began writing in Arabic in her father's periodical al-Mahrūsah¹⁷ and others, and began to make a name for herself. She also published a series of books, some of which were: Sawāniḥ Fatāh (The Thoughts of a Girl; Cairo, 1922); Ẓulumāt wa Ashi'ah

(Darkness and Rays; Cairo, 1923); Kalimāt wa Ishārāt (Words and Signals; Cairo, 1922); and Bāḥithat al-Bādiyah, Malak Ḥifnī Nāṣif (Cairo, 1920).¹⁸ Jamīl Jabr, who collected and published Mayy's letters and memoirs (Beirut, 1951-52), says that her house in Cairo was a regular meeting place for writers such as al-ʿAqqād, Ṣarrūf, Waliyy al-Dīn Yakan, al-Rāfiʿī, Muṭrān, and Ṭāhā Ḥusayn.¹⁹

In 1928, Mayy's father died and later other close friends such as Jibrān with whom she had corresponded for some time and whose death caused her much grief. After this she felt compelled to leave her familiar surroundings and travelled to France and other European countries. She returned to Egypt and later to Lebanon in 1937, where her mental illness, which started with the death of her father and friends, became more serious. She returned to Cairo where she died in 1941.²⁰

Mayy had a great interest in the causes of Arab women, analyzing various factors including rights and obligations. As noted previously, she established epistolar contact with Malak Ḥifnī Nāṣif (Bāḥithat al-Bādiyah). With other persons in her literary circle like Jibrān and Luṭfī al-Sayyid, she exchanged ideas about the status of Arab women. Her major emphasis was on biological and sociological problems related to the nature of woman. In a

letter to Jibrān, Mayy discussed the liberation of women, saying:

I basically share with you some opinions about women's liberation. Like men, woman should have her own choice of spouse from among young people, according to her own desire and taste, and without imposition from any quarter.²¹

Her understanding of the role of woman appears more clearly in a letter sent to Luṭfī al-Sayyid concerning the memorial ceremony on the fortieth day after the death of Faṭḥī Zagh-lūl Pasha, in which she blamed him for not extending invitations to women, saying:

It is strange that you did not invite women to such an important meeting which might have a great impact on their way of life, enliven their minds to the importance of education, and teach them about the greatness of their fatherland and its noble personalities-- whereas you do allow them to frequent the opera house.²²

Mayy was followed by a number of other women writers whose names appeared in different journals. Among them were: Widād Sakākīnī, Suhayr Qalamāwī, Salmā al-Ḥaffār al-Kuzbarī, Bint al-Shāṭi', Asmā' Fahmī, Sophie 'Abd Allāh, and others.

It is to be noticed that most of the writers mentioned here published articles, collections of poetry, stories, etc. The literary output of Arab women, as far as

short stories and novels were concerned, was not abundant.

It seems that most women writers concerned themselves with specific subjects, concentrating mainly on educational, moral, and traditional topics in the writing of fiction.

At the end of the 1940's, writers such as Widād Sakākīnī and Salmā al-Ḥaffār al-Kuzbarī began to compete with their male counterparts in writing stories and novels on subjects of wider interest. But Ḥusām al-Khatīb,²³ for one, does not think that these writers were even capable of competing, for their stories were marked by the traditional elements of their predecessors. 'Ādil Abū Shanab,²⁴ on the other hand, considers Widād Sakākīnī's stories as a starting point of "feminist" stories. In his opinion, there were no feminist stories, as we know them except those written by Widād Sakākīnī, as in her first collection Marāyā al-Nās (People's Mirrors; Cairo, 1947), and her second collection Bayn al-Nīl wa al-Nakhīl (Between the Nile and the Palms; Cairo, 1948). Her stories are based on social events concerning contemporary women's issues. As for liberation, she is regarded as a defender of women's rights, but without exaggeration.

Up to the end of the Second World War, most women's literary works were dominated by the sad and melancholic characteristics which reflected women's feelings.

within the context of their subjugation by the traditional and religious restrictions of Arab society. The literary works of these writers up to the end of the 1940's can thus be characterized as reflecting their respect for tradition on the one hand and their desire for freedom on the other. These writers focus mainly on the emotional and psychological aspects of women's problems. They do not discuss in depth any other matters related to the individual woman's political, social, or philosophical aspirations; nor do they influence their culture. What discussion there is of these matters appears only as partial commentary in books such as Ziyādah's al-Musāwāh (Equality), in Bāhithat al-Bādiyah's al-Nisā'iyāt, and Zaynab Fawwāz's al-Rasā'il al-Zaynabīyah (Zaynab's Letters) and al-Durr al-Manthūr fī Ṭabaqāt Rabbāt al-Khudūr (Scattered Pearls about Classes of Women in Boudoirs). Fawwāz's first book consists of two hundred and eighteen pages about women's rights and social position. Her second is a biographical study of famous Eastern and Western women.

All of the above writers seem to be very much aware of the obstacles they have had to overcome and the struggle they have been forced to wage in their attempt to identify the needs and rights of women. These obstacles

include social and religious pressures as well as women's economic and political statelessness. All these matters have been further complicated by the long and hated domination of Ottoman and, later, Western imperialism.

After the Second World War which brought national independence and many dramatic changes in the political, social and economic fields in the Arab world, the women's literary movement became more prominent. Moreover, this turn of events was enhanced under the impact of Western culture and the development of social and educational institutions which have, since the 1950's, played a vital role in changing social attitudes and permitting a fuller participation of women in the social developments in many parts of the Arab world, but more particularly in Lebanon which has been especially imbued with the spirit of modernity.

In the late 1950's, a revolutionary feminist movement in literature was led by Laylā Ba'albakī which has affected many subsequent writers.²⁵ In her novel Anā Ahya (I Live; Beirut, 1958), Laylā Ba'albakī strongly criticizes the social and religious Arab traditions. This Lebanese Muslim writer later wrote al-Ālihah al-Mamsūkhah (The Monster Gods; Beirut, 1960), and a collection of short stories entitled Safīnat Hanān ilā al-Qamar (A Spaceship of Tenderness to the Moon; Beirut, 1964). It was this

collection--following as it did two already controversial novels--that caused an intellectual uproar in literary, social, and legal circles.

Ba'albaki presents the Arab woman as a weak individual in her society, who cannot seem to rise above her role as a mother and wife. The Arab woman is also presented as a conservative individual who must uphold the traditions and who must keep her virginity intact until her wedding night. In the introduction to her novel al-Ālihah al-Mamsūkhah, she discusses virginity as follows:

What we mean by the 'Monster God' is the 'Holy Wall'--the hymen. Under the auspices of this 'Holy Wall' begins the progression of our lives in Arab society at large and in different sects, boiling with revolution and longing for the past. Through this 'Holy Wall' we love. Through this 'Holy Wall' we bear our children. With this 'Holy Wall' we offer God our prayers. With this 'Holy Wall' we eat our bread. This 'Holy Wall' transcends our personalities. The 'Holy Wall' is the criterion of our dignity. Out of this 'Holy Wall' is derived the authorities of our family, mother, father, the head of state, and the success of the MPs. In other words, this 'Wall' is the force of our life and it is death.²⁶

Most of Ba'albaki's characters try to escape their social reality and their traditions. They reveal their hostility to their parents and towards any form of

authoritarian system. She calls for individual freedom as well as a liberation of the Arab woman who must be able to determine her own way of life and thought. Ba'albakī calls for equal opportunity in all phases of life. The reader notices that sex plays a very important role in her novels as she sees sexual freedom, for the Arab woman, as the first step towards obtaining power over her own will. Her heroines find themselves in a labyrinth of physical discovery that becomes the most important element in their lives.

I haven't listened to the news for the last two days. I did not read one single newspaper. He does not know that I have been sitting before the mirror for the last two days. I have been listening to more dangerous and more valuable news, broadcast by my own body which demands its own freedom.²⁷

Laylā Bā'albakī was regarded as too refractory in respect to tradition and was labelled as a writer dealing with adab fāḍih (scandalous literature), endangering public morality.

An official investigation of Safīnat Hanān ilā al-Qamar was conducted in which Ba'albakī was accused of public immorality and disrespect of tradition.²⁸ On June 15, 1964, a trial was held at which sentence was rendered to confiscate her books. All bookstores in Lebanon known to carry her works were raided and the books destroyed. This action was the first of its kind in the history of Lebanese

justice and literature. The following is a characteristic sample from one of Ba'albakī's works which the Lebanese public prosecutor felt "endangered" public morality:

He lay on his back. His hand went deep under the sheet pulling my hand and putting it below his chest. Then his hand moved over my abdomen. He licked my ears, my lips, and roamed over me, whispering that he was in ecstasy and that I was fresh, soft, dangerous, and that he missed me a lot.²⁹

Her defence lawyer stated that Ba'albakī who left her small town and travelled to Paris, where she remained for some time, was greatly influenced by the Western lifestyle which was totally different from her own conservative and unsophisticated upbringing. While there, she learnt to adapt herself to the cultural environment of Europe which, in turn, had a great impact on her works such as Safīnat Ḥanān ilā al-Qamar. In this manner, her lawyer attempted to defend the motives for her writings; she bluntly denied the accusation that she had written against public morality and insisted that she described the facts as they were in her society. Her lawyer further successfully argued that a writer's work must be studied in its entirety and not in part.³⁰ A sample of it may, by itself, be clearly erotic and arouse sexual instincts, but if placed in its context, its message might be radically affected.

With these points, Ba'albakī won her case and was found not guilty of the charges. State officials permitted the republication of her works shortly thereafter.

However, several other women writers followed Ba'albakī's footsteps in the Arab world in general and in Lebanon in particular. In Lebanon they were: Laylā 'Usayrān, Emilie Naṣr Allāh, Mājidah 'Aṭṭār, 'Alyā, "Hugo" al-Dālātī, Andrée Ṭarabayh, Nūr Salmān, and, of course, Ghādah al-Sammān.

From the writings of Ba'albakī and some other writers mentioned above, it appears that the contemporary Arab feminist fiction does not reflect, up to this instance, woman's problems as a woman and as a human being. Despite the profusion of works by Arab women writers, it is clear that literature is still personal and concerned only with bourgeois and petit-bourgeois worries. The glamour experienced by some women in terms of freedoms they enjoy (or what is labelled as such) blinds them to numerous social visions based on radical as well as scientific intellectualism. This leads women's literature to hover on the edge of mediocrity, without dealing in depth with the essence or the nature of the problems, which are in themselves primarily of social, economic, and political consideration.

Although the works of Ghādah al-Sammān are numerous, and her name is well-known in the Arab world, studies of her publications and her life are quite limited. Those that exist were written in the 1970's, that is, after she had published her Raḥīl al-Marāfi' al-Qadīmah (Departure from Ancient Ports; Beirut, 1973). In this collection of short stories, she expresses her views of the Arab defeat of 1967, the Palestinian Revolution, and commando activities. This collection is regarded by most Arab literary critics as the beginning of a new stage in her writing. In fact, her earlier works are considered a part of the so-called "women's literature" (adab nisā'i). The phrase "so-called" is used here because there has never been any clear-cut definition of what we mean by Arab women's literature. Strange as it may seem, the Arab world finds it difficult to define not only this genre but other genres as well. Most Arab critics I am aware of give this literature a shallow and insignificant definition; yet, they all seem to agree that women's literature is that which is written only by women or deals with women's issues: emancipation, oppression, lack of rights, and so on. As most of the critics in this area are Arab men, however, their literary opinions must be considered questionable, particularly since they themselves are still struggling for a definition of their

own literature. It is ironic, then, that these critics have different opinions about the content of women's literature, and yet, deny the existence of any real definition of it.

Ghālī Shukrī defines women's literature as "that which is written by modern women, and which sees 'women's issues' as its focal point." He further describes it as "a separatist literature"³¹ created out of social pressure, and cites the works of Laylā Ba'albakī, Colette Khūrī, and Sophie 'Abd Allāh as examples of this phenomenon. However, he excludes Sophie 'Abd Allāh's work al-Bāb al-Maftūh (The Open Door) from this category.³² He also reprimands this type of literature for being irrelevant to the present Arab reality, as it is a treatment of slavery and not of liberation, a divisive element to the understanding of sexuality, and a divisive element to Arab society in general.³³

Shukrī admits in his Ghādah al-Sammān bilā Ajnihah (Ghādah al-Sammān without Wings; Beirut, 1977) that his previous critical study, Azmat al-Jins fī al-Qiṣṣah al-'Arabiyyah (The Sexual Crisis in Arab Fiction; Beirut, 1963), considered only the works of Laylā Ba'albakī, Colette Khūrī, and Sophie 'Abd Allāh as good examples of female fiction. He says that he deliberately avoided studying al-Sammān's literature in his earlier book because he felt that she had not yet expressed herself to her full potential, whereas all

others had reached their peak--they could not present us with any new revelation, observation, or insight, even if they wrote thousands of more pages.³⁴ He emphasizes the distinctive nature of al-Sammān's later works by describing her collection Raḥīl al-Marāfi' al-Qadīmah as "a departure and a birth" (raḥīl wa wilādah).³⁵ In this collection she succeeds in breaking away from what he calls "an association" of female authors whose writings are so familiar that it is difficult to distinguish one from the other. According to him, the reason for this unfortunate categorization is lack of experience and awareness, not lack of talent.

Muḥyī al-Dīn Ṣubḥī advocates a definition different from that of Shukrī. Ṣubḥī cites the experience of the Arab woman as an experience of rebellion and revolt. In his opinion, women's literature is a rebellion against home, society, school, religion, and other pillars of tradition. He concludes that a definition of women's literature can be derived from this experience, and he calls it "individualistic literature."³⁶

However, 'Afīf Farrāj is satisfied with the term "women's literature" without attaching any additional qualification to it, such as "separatist" or "individualistic." But he is concerned with distinguishing between one female writer and another, not between a female and a male writer.

He states that: .

Al-Sammān started from the bottom. More progress was accomplished in Layl al-Ghurabā', although she ultimately achieved her best in Raḥīl al-Marāfi' al-Qadīmah which distinguished her, in my opinion, from all other writers of her generation, such as: Laylā Ba'albakī, Colette Khūrī, and Laylā 'Usayrān who usually published one good work in the beginning of their literary careers and then remained rather stagnant.³⁷

In considering the rather popular viewpoint that men in Arab society are the stronger figures, superior in authority and judgement, while women, conversely, are weak and suppressed, we find that George Ṭarābīshī, for one, feels that man's relation to woman in Arab society is still based on oppression and exploitation. He further asserts that if one applies the dynamics of this unjust relationship to that which exists between human beings and the world, it provides excellent justification for the continuity of this oppression.³⁸ He then continues:

Because of this, the disposition of beauty promoted in the minds of the reader in novels written by women is not usually experienced in those written by men. This is a result of sexual bias against women.³⁹

On this point, he comes to a fairly adequate understanding

of what women's literature is about:

If we accept the fact that there are women's novels, we should accept that they are not what is written by women only, but what is written by women in a style different from that of men. In other words, if the world is the basis of what we may term men's novels, then novels written by women are self-centered. Because of this, we may assume that the power of structure is the first and sole artistic principle in novels written by men. But those written by women acquire their beauty from the richness of their emotional feelings.⁴⁰

In summarizing his viewpoint, Ṭarābīshī states that men's novels are intellectual, while those of women are emotional. However, he recognizes that this is merely a generalization on his part.

In one of my interviews with the Egyptian author and critic, Edward al-Kharrāt,⁴¹ I asked him about women's fiction in general, and about Ghādah al-Sammān in particular.⁴² He looked at me curiously (and rather derisively) and said: "Is there such a thing as women's fiction?" Then he continued: "I did not study Ghādah's works; therefore, I have no opinion to express." But when I asked him about male writers such as: Maḥfūz, Idrīs, al-Ṭayyīb Ṣāliḥ, and others, he gave me a detailed survey of their works. However, he failed to give any detail about writers like: Mayy Ziyādah, Laylā Ba'albakī, and Samīrah 'Azzām. This

means that writers like him still regard women's literature as non-existent. Then I asked him: "Do you think that the short story written by women is different from that written by men?" He claimed that there is no difference between the two, citing the works of Simone de Beauvoir as an example of the universality and neutrality of literature, adding that her writings were not classified as "women's works". On this point he did not present adequately the important role Simone de Beauvoir played in women's movement in Western Europe as well as in North America.

In an interview in Cairo with the Iraqi poet 'Abd al-Wahhāb al-Bayyātī, I posed the same question about women's fiction to which he responded:

I don't agree with this difference and discrimination because it is derived from the narrow vision of Arab writers. I view with sorrow the fact that women in our society are still in a bad position. It is this fact that forced woman to write about her social oppression and call for sexual revolt as part of her expression of individual freedom.⁴³

We notice here that al-Bayyātī comes very close to understanding the problems that overwhelm Arab women and gives women's literature its unique nature. All of the critics noted above, except al-Bayyātī, seem to confuse the social status of women with their literary aspirations, and do not

dare to speculate on why women write the way they do or whether or not it is important for them to name their own literature.

How can the Arab critics expect the Arab woman to draw a clear-cut definition of her writing, be it poetry or prose, to define her role in Arab society, and to come out of a long nightmare and stand free before the sun when we still read in literature written by women passages like the following?:

I am your prisoner and your slave, in the name of the shari'ah, in the name of the law, in the name of traditions, in the name of circumstances, in the name of destiny and fate.⁴⁴

Or this one:

He screamed at me: "Your small head has not been made to think, but to wait for me in my bed. Go there and wait for me." And he came with his "big" body to begin brainwashing me once more.⁴⁵

However, the pessimistic picture painted by the above passages is not the most dominant view, although there is some truth to the imprisonment and slavery of women. There is another truth in this matter, however, which is only now beginning to emerge from this society, due to a handful of writers and thinkers, male and female. These are Arabs who care about the liberation and freedom of thought and

ideas in their mates. It is these men and women who will bring to the new generation a healthy attitude with clear vision and outlook in which future generations would mark this age as a new dawn.

In a conference named "Woman's Issues and Her Liberation" held under the auspices of Dār al-Fann wa al-Adab in Beirut in May, 1974, a variety of opinions was expressed on this same topic by the speakers.⁴⁶ During the course of the conference, Janīn Rubayz stated that:

... the liberation movement has become that of sexuality where man has suppressed woman from the beginning of time; woman bears children and brings to man sexual satisfaction. Therefore, it is obvious that man would oppress woman with all applicable pressure. Sexual liberation then would end man's superiority.... It would force a reconsideration of human relationships and allow woman to use her own body and enjoy her own sexuality as she wishes.⁴⁷

At the same conference, Ilhām al-Baṣṣāṭ stated that:

Sexual liberation is not a man's issue specifically, for man does not deal with any liberation other than his own. He personally owns his own body, while woman's body is shared and is not hers.... Sexual liberation is only part of the total human liberation which includes economic, political, educational and social liberation.⁴⁸

To reiterate what has been stated, it is probable

that literature written by women does not need a special name nor does it need a special definition, as long as it is classified as "literature". This is because literature is part of the whole writings of a language or people which has been preserved, a part of which is noted for its form and expression, its style and its particular treatment of a given subject.

It is clear from the above discussion that what is required in this field of study are specialists in literary criticism who can evaluate literature objectively, regardless of the sex of the author. Despite this ideal, let us consider some studies which shed some light on Ghadah al-Samman's works..

One of the first studies made on al-Sammān was in al-Adab wa al-Idiyūlūjiyā fī Sūrīyah (Literature and Ideology in Syria; Damascus, 1974), by Bū 'Alī Yāsin and Nabīl Sulaymān. This is a critical study of twenty Syrian writers whose names are as follows: 'Abd al-Salām al-'Ujaylī, Colette Khūrī, Ṣidqī Ismā'īl, Ḥaydar Ḥaydar, Ulfah al-Idlibī, Muṣṭafā al-Ḥājj, Ḥasīb Kayyālī, Mamdūh 'Adwān, Hānī al-Rāhib, Zakarīyā Tāmir, 'Alī Kan'an, George Sālim, Walīd Ikhlāṣī, 'Alī al-Jundī, Muḥammad al-Māghūṭ, 'Abd Allāh 'Abd, Sa'd Allāh Wannūs, Fāris Zarzūr, Ḥannā Maynah, and Ghadah al-Sammān. This book is a study of the above-mentioned

writers and of their literary works between 1967 and 1973. Different kinds of creative writing were studied, such as poetry, short stories, plays, and novels, portraying various ideological trends. The study attempts to focus on a socialist system aiming at the improvement of the different classes of people in society, specifically choosing the above-mentioned writers to achieve this end. Before analyzing some of the writers' works, the authors reproduce a part of a personal interview with each of the writers published previously in various newspapers. In analyzing al-Sammān's Raḥīl al-Marāfi' al-Qadīmah, they focus on socialism as a solution to women's social problems and criticize her as follows:

As for women's issues and their relation to men, she viewed them from a bourgeois point of view and not from that of the plebeians. Because of this, she neither studies the social exploitation of women, nor does she incline to show the need for women to share in the productive activity. She thus appears to make the feminist cause a purely sexual issue, because she does not relate women's liberation to the socio-economic system. She feels that women's liberation cannot be achieved unless men change their attitude towards women. This makes it seem as if the question of women's liberation is a matter of convenience.⁴⁹

The authors state that they have chosen those

literary works to study because they found it difficult to study the Syrian writers of all times. Moreover, they wanted to study specifically and extensively the works of these twenty writers. They felt that the 1967 military defeat of the Arabs showed the need for proletarian writers, but it is to be noted that most of the writers studied in this book are part and parcel of the middle and lower class (the bourgeoisie and the petite-bourgeoisie). On this point, the two authors raise the question in their introduction as to whether the book is a political or a literary study. In my view, their study is concerned with both because of the circumstances and ideology of the period. However, it does not offer any deep penetration of the writers' feelings about the current events of the period. Moreover, the interview with every writer given as an introduction to each study is only a part of a more extensive published interview, and as such, does not give an adequate representation of the writer interviewed. In this sense, the study is merely a commentary on certain events and a summary of certain issues. However, al-Sammān's two critics do not fail to note some of her strong points, such as: her love of the homeland, and her feminist position. These two critics also indicate that she has shed her surrealistic approach and adopted a new liberal approach. Regardless of these details, however, the study of al-Sammān

in this book, in my view, is not a complete one.

This first study was followed by al-Ḥurriyah fī Adab al-Mar'ah (Freedom in Women's Literature; Beirut, 1975), by 'Afīf Farrāj. In this book, Farrāj studies al-Sammān, among others, beginning with her book, Lā Baḥr fī Bayrūt up to Bayrūt 75. Along with al-Sammān, Farrāj writes of many notable female writers, such as: Laylā 'Usayrān, Wiṣāl Khālīd, Emilie Naṣr Allāh, Colette Khūrī, Laylā Ba-'albakī, Salmā al-Ḥaffār al-Kuzbarī, and others. Some of the essays in this book are clearly detailed and comprehensive pieces on some of the writers. Farrāj is sketchy in certain parts, however, and we find that he gives only superficial treatment to those he considers minor writers.

While the title of his book is definite and to the point, the reader is somehow disappointed with the content when he realizes that Farrāj has studied certain short story writers and a few novelists, while many other significant novelists, poets, and playwrights are not included. Farrāj also limits his study to writers from Lebanon and Syria, leaving out writers from the rest of the Arab world.

In his introduction, Farrāj sheds some light on women's social problems in a backward environment. His discussion of this problem, however, is not followed with any depth in the rest of the book which seems to lack the organization needed to focus on this issue and others.

As far as al-Sammān's work is concerned, Farrāj in his work al-Hurriyah seems to summarize events and comment on some of them. He tries to link al-Sammān with the surrealist and romantic schools in the West. Neglecting her first book as unimportant, he presents her subsequent works in a fairly comprehensive study, attributing the sophistication in her writings to her development as a person and a writer:

Al-Sammān started from the bottom; more progress was accomplished in Layl al-Ghurabā', although she ultimately achieved her best in Raḥil al-Marāfi' al-Qadīmah which distinguished her, in my opinion, from all other writers of her generation, such as Laylā Ba'al-bakī, Colette Khūrī, and Laylā 'Usayrān, who usually published one good work in the beginning of their literary lives and then remained rather stagnant.⁵⁰

Although he tells us that al-Sammān is different from other writers of her generation, he fails to tell us how she is different, and besides, does not demonstrate an adequate knowledge of her works and contributions to literature.

One of the most important books on al-Sammān's works up to and including Kawābis is Ghadah al-Sammān bilā Ajniḥah by Ghālī Shukrī. In the introduction to this study, the author recalls how he wrote this book at different times and in different places. He also writes how he tried to understand the meaning of the journey al-Sammān had embarked

on for more than ten years. He praises, "to a great extent, her maturity and healthy outlook on life, and makes the reader feel that her journey is an imaginative one to unknown lands.

Shukrī divides the book into three movements instead of three chapters. The first movement is entitled "Love and Horror in the Days of the Defeat" which is a detailed study of Rahīl al-Marāfi' al-Qadīmah (Departure from Ancient Ports) with four poetic subtitles. It seems that he passes critical judgement first and then devotes the rest of the time trying to justify his opinion. In studying "Ḥarīq Dhālika al-Ṣayf" (That Summer's Fire), one of the stories in the book, he believes that al-Sammān prophesied the Arab defeat. It is questionable, however, whether she can be said to have prophetic vision simply because she reported events which had previously taken place. Perhaps he forgot that her book had been published six years after the defeat and therefore the optimism expressed at the end of this story is not sufficient reason for him to come to this conclusion, nor is it an element of prophecy.

In the second movement, Shukrī discusses Bayrūt 75 under the title "The Road to Regret" where he begins the treatment of the novel after extracting different excerpts contrasting al-Sammān's work with others, and justifies

her superiority. What is curious about this contrast, however, is his insistence on not giving new definitions to qualify her writings or those of any other female writer as "feminist literature." Yet, he seems not to stand by his conviction as he states:

There is no relationship between what other female writers write and al-Sammān's writings. The only relationship we can speak of is that which links al-Sammān to modern Arabic literature, a relationship which is highlighted by the influence of such writers as Najīb Maḥfūẓ . . . whose literature has never been called masculine literature, but simply literature; it is our literature, our consciousness, and our intellect.⁵¹

Although Shukrī is aware of the history of Arab women and the suppression they have experienced, he does not deal with the writings of most of the female writers from that perspective, except in al-Sammān's case. The reader is left to wonder why, in his opinion, suppression and subjection of the Arab women influenced her writings only. Again, in Bayrūt 75, she is compared to Zarqā' al-Yamāmah whose prophecies never failed to come true.

In the third movement, Shukrī deals with Kawābīs Bayrūt in a summary fashion, comparing al-Sammān to Sartre, de Beauvoir, and other Western writers. Kawābīs Bayrūt is an epic as far as Shukrī is concerned, and as he ends his

book, he describes al-Sammān's reflective writings and her different forms of behaviour. In Shukrī, the reader encounters admiration for al-Sammān's qualities in style, language, theme, characterization, and so on, as if the critic were reluctant to shed any light on her weaknesses. He had spent five years preparing a thesis admiring her, without treating her harshly, as he treated other writers in his earlier studies. Moreover, in his critique he is very much influenced by her poetic style to the point where the reader finds it difficult to differentiate between his and hers. He entertains the reader with poetic terms far removed from any critical language, such as the following:

What is the essence of the principal action in Bayrūt 75? Here we start our journey with the secrets of the "artistic world" which is similar to our particular world. It may be "personal illusion" as Eliot says, which means a break away from linguistic to artistic reality. More intricate and complex, it is possible to find in it the roots and branches, and to discover the leaves, flowers, fruits and worms which cannot be seen by the naked eye.⁵²

In spite of the above study of al-Sammān, her works deserve a full study by themselves. Shukrī's study does not achieve this end, although he sheds some light on her works and those of others.

Another important recent book which includes a study of al-Sammān's works is Évelyne Accad's Veil of Shame: The Role of Women in the Contemporary Fiction of North Africa and the Arab World (Sherbrooke, 1978). In her introduction, this Lebanese writer raises the question whether we can consider the Arab culture as a single unity. To this, she asserts that there are numerous social and cultural discontinuities on the one hand, and certain cultural common elements on the other which are present in all Arab countries. From this point of view, she studies the Arab condition of Arab women as it is described by some Arab male and female writers in North Africa and the rest of the Arab world, including Khanātah Banūnah, Laylā Ba'albakī, Colette Khūrī, Samīrah 'Azzām, Sophie 'Abd Allāh, and Ghādah al-Sammān.

Évelyne Accad's study of al-Sammān deals with some of her works based mainly on women's point of view. She sees her writings as portraying women striving for self-realization. Her characters are frustrated upper-class Arab women who attempt to escape the boredom of a truncated existence by launching into experiences on the fringe of social acceptability. In a poetic and suggestive style she reveals characters who have chosen madness, sexual deviation or conscious martyrdom over against tradition.⁵³

Through sensitive analysis of women's roles in

the stories, Accad shows sad characteristics of women's condition in the Arab world without paying much attention to the changes which took place in society during the 1960's and 1970's. Although it is true that women's condition as described by Accad does exist in certain parts of the Arab world, it should be realized that women are gradually obtaining their freedom and are playing important and positive roles in their societies. Al-Sammān's recent works, such as Bayrūt 75 and Kawābīs Bayrūt, as well as those of other writers, show more understanding and participation of women in literature and other aspects of life.

A few other short critiques of the works of al-Sammān exist such as those by Muḥyī al-Dīn Ṣubḥī, 'Adnān al-Dā'ūq and others regarding a particular topic, but they do not tell us much about al-Sammān as a person.

My study of this writer, therefore, will be based on her works and her biography deduced from several interviews, especially the one mentioned in Shukrī's book in which al-Sammān gives an account of her life and character. In addition to these sources, I have also a few letters from her to me in which she explains certain points.

NOTES

¹Wardah al-Yāzījī was a Lebanese poet, and the daughter of the famous writer Naṣīf al-Yāzījī. She edited and published several essays in al-Diyā' which was owned by her brother Ibrāhīm. She collected her poems in a book entitled Ḥadīqat al-Ward (The Rose Garden). Most of the poems in this collection were lamentations of deceased members of her family. Yūsuf As'ad Dāghir, Maṣādir al-Dirāsah al-Adabīyah: al-Fikr al-'Arabī al-Ḥadīth fī Siyar A'lāmih (Beirut: Manshūrāt al-Jāmi'ah al-Lubnānīyah, 1972), vol. 3, part 2, p. 1414; idem, al-Uṣūl al-'Arabīyah li al-Dirāsāt al-Lubnānīyah (Beirut: Manshūrāt al-Jāmi'ah al-Lubnānīyah, 1972), p. 223; Mayy Ziyādah, Wardah al-Yāzījī (Egypt: Maṭba'at al-Balāgh, n.d.), pp. 10-7; Emilie Fāris Ibrāhīm, Adībāt Lubnānīyāt (Beirut: Dār al-Rayḥānī, n.d.), pp. 15-25.

²Zaynab Fawwāz was a Lebanese writer, a poet and a journalist. She was married for a while to the writer al-Adīb al-Nāzimī. Soon after, she left for Cairo where she became known for her essays in different newspapers. Among her collected publications are a play of four acts and a novella. Y.A. Dāghir, Maṣādir (Beirut: Manshūrāt Ahl al-Qalam fī Lubnān, 1956), vol. 2, pp. 637-9; idem, al-Uṣūl al-'Arabīyah, p. 217; E.F. Ibrāhīm, Adībāt, pp. 27-43.

³Labībah Hāshim was a Lebanese writer of short stories and a journalist who was born in Beirut in 1882. She travelled to Egypt in 1900 where she studied classical Arabic under the supervision of Ibrāhīm al-Yāzījī. She contributed to the art of short stories and novels, and co-edited several Egyptian magazines. Later she founded

a magazine of her own entitled Fatāt al-Sharq (The Eastern Girl). Her publications included a book on education, some short stories, and several translated novels. Y.A. Dāghir, Maṣādir, vol. 3, part. 2, pp. 1365-7; idem, al-Uṣūl al-‘Arabīyah, p. 232; E.F. Ibrāhīm, Adībāt, pp. 71-8; Anwar al-Jundī, Aḍwā’ ‘alā al-Adab al-‘Arabī al-Mu‘āṣir (Cairo: Dār al-Kitāb al-‘Arabī li-al-Ṭibā‘ah wa al-Nashr, 1969), pp. 182-6.

⁴ Afīfah Karam was a Lebanese writer, a journalist and a playwright who was born in ‘Amshīt in 1883, where she was also educated. She also studied in a convent in Jubayl, and later married Karam Yūsuf Karam and migrated with him to Louisiana, U.S.A. There she founded two magazines, The New World and The New Woman. She also published essays in other magazines calling for the liberation of Arab women. She authored three novels and translated five novels. Y.A. Dāghir, al-Uṣūl al-‘Arabīyah, p. 218; E.F. Ibrāhīm, Adībāt, pp. 95-104.

⁵ Julia Ṭu‘mah Dimashqīyah was a Lebanese poet who was born in al-Mukhtārah in 1880, educated in the American School for Girls in Sidon, and in Shuwayfāt school. She taught in Lebanon, Palestine, and Egypt. She founded the Arab feminist magazine in Lebanon, al-Mar’ah al-Jadīdah (The New Woman) in which she addressed mainly her country's women. She also published essays in several magazines and wrote a book on Mayy Ziyādah's visit to Syria and Lebanon entitled Mayy fī Sūriyah (Mayy in Syria). Y.A. Dāghir, al-Uṣūl al-‘Arabīyah, pp. 211-2; E.F. Ibrāhīm, Adībāt, pp. 81-91.

⁶ Salmā Ṣāyigh was a Lebanese writer and a journalist. She was born in Beirut and studied under Ibrāhīm Mundhir in Zahrat al-Iḥsān school. She married Dr. Farīd Kassāb only to

leave him and join the school of dentistry in Paris. She later migrated to Brazil where she joined "the Andalusian League of Writers". She edited Ṣawṭ al-Mar'ah (The Voice of Woman) magazine, founded and headed several feminist organizations. Y.A. Dāghir, al-Uṣūl al-'Arabīyah, p. 214; E.F. Ibrāhīm, Adībāt, pp. 151-66.

⁷Hanā Kasbānī Kūrānī was born in Kufurshīmā of Syrian parents. She was educated at the American missionary school in Kufurshīmā, at Shamlān British School, and at the American School of Beirut for Girls. She later taught at the American School for Girls in Tripoli. Her publications began to appear after her marriage to Amīn Kūrānī. She headed a delegation to the International Women's Conference in Chicago in 1892. Later, she went on a lecture tour in Boston, New York, and Brooklyn, defending the resolutions taken at the conference on the equality of men and women. She went back to Lebanon after she became tubercular and died at the young age of 29 of tuberculosis. Y.A. Dāghir, Maṣādir, vol. 3, part 2, pp. 1091-2; *idem*, al-Uṣūl al-'Arabīyah, p. 219; E.F. Ibrāhīm, Adībāt, pp. 47-56.

⁸Malak Ḥifnī Nāṣif was born in Cairo in 1886. Her father Ḥifnī Nāṣif was a famous writer. She was the first Egyptian woman to complete an elementary education in 1903. Soon after, she began to teach and contribute to the education of the Egyptian women and to the establishment of a feminist movement. She published several articles under her pseudonym Bāḥithat al-Bādiyah in the newspaper al-Jarīdah. These articles were collected in a book entitled al-Nisā'ī-yāt (Feminist Essays) which concerns itself with women's problems, such as: the veil, the education of girls, and polygamy. She died at the young age of thirty-two in 1918.

Y.A. Dāghir, Maṣādir, vol. 2, p. 739; Mayy Ziyādah, Bāḥithat al-Bādiyah aw Malak Ḥifnī Nāṣif (Cairo: Maṭba'at al-Muqataṭaf, 1920); Anwar al-Jundī, Aḍwā', pp.196-200., For further details on the biography of some female writers, see Y.A. Dāghir, al-Uṣūl al-'Arabīyah, pp. 206-23.

⁹Y.A. Dāghir, al-Uṣūl al-'Arabīyah, pp. 212-3; Jamīl Jabr, ed., Rasā'il Mayy (Beirut: Dār Bayrūt, 1954), pp. 3-11; E.F. Ibrāhīm, Adībāt, p. 131; Muḥammad 'Abd al-Ghanī Ḥasan, Mayy Adībat al-Sharq wa al-'Urūbah (Cairo: Dār al-Thaqāfah al-'Arabīyah li-al-Ṭibā'ah, n.d.), pp. 11-5.

¹⁰Y.A. Dāghir, Maṣādir, vol. 2, p. 739; al-Jundī, Adab al-Mar'ah, p. 6; Malak Ḥifnī Nāṣif, al-Nisā'īyāt, vol. 1 (Cairo: Maṭba'at al-Jarīdah, 1328 A.H.).

¹¹E.F. Ibrāhīm, Adībāt, p. 139.

¹²J. Jabr, ed., Rasā'il Mayy, p. 14.

¹³Ibid., p. 15.

¹⁴Y.A. Dāghir, Maṣādir, vol. 2, p. 435; J. Jabr, ed., Rasā'il Mayy, p. 3; idem, Mayy Ziyādah fī Mudhakkirātihā (Beirut: Dār al-Rayḥānī, 1952), p. 3; E.F. Ibrāhīm, Adībāt, pp. 131-47.

¹⁵Isis is the name of an ancient Egyptian goddess which the writer identified with the Virgin Mary whose name she bore (Mary or Mayy). Copia is a Latin word meaning "abundance," a reference to Ziyādah, her family name. J. Jabr, ed., Azāhīr al-Ḥulm (Beirut: Dār Bayrūt, 1952), p. 3, n. 2; idem, Rasā'il Mayy, p. 5, n. 1.

¹⁶It is worthy to note that George Eliot wrote in

the nineteenth century under a pseudonym only to avoid the prejudice she may have encountered if she had published her works under her real name, Mary Ann Evans.

¹⁷Al-Maḥrūsah was a weekly magazine founded and edited by Adīb Ishāq in 1880. Subsequently, other distinguished writers edited the magazine, such as Salīm Naqqāsh and his father Khalīl Naqqāsh. Ilyās Ziyādah bought and edited this magazine in 1909 where his daughter's essays began to appear. Y.A. Dāghir, Maṣādir, vol. 3, part 2, p. 1343; *idem*, Qāmūs al-Ṣiḥāfah al-Lubnānīyah 1858-1974 (Beirut: al-Maktabah al-Sharqīyah, 1978), p. 255.

¹⁸*Idem*, Maṣādir, vol. 2, p. 437. For the complete writings of Mayy Ziyādah, see Mayy Ziyādah, al-Mu'allafāt al-Kāmilah, 2 vols. (Beirut: Mu'assasat Nawfal, 1975).

¹⁹Y.A. Dāghir, Maṣādir, vol. 2, p. 436; J. Jabr, ed., Rasā'il Mayy, pp. 7-8; E.F. Ibrāhīm, Adībāt, p. 135.

²⁰J. Jabr, ed., Rasā'il Mayy, pp. 9-10; E.F. Ibrāhīm, Adībāt, p. 147.

²¹J. Jabr, ed., Rasā'il Mayy, p. 17; M. 'A. Ḥasan, "Dawr Mayy fī al-Nahḍah al-Nisā'īyah," Mayy Adībat al-Sharq, pp. 115-27.

²²J. Jabr, ed., Rasā'il Mayy, p. 37; M. 'A. Ḥasan, Mayy Adībat al-Sharq, pp. 119-21. For further information about her view on women, see Mayy Ziyādah, "al-Mar'ah wa al-Tamaddun," Kalimāt wa Ishārāt (Beirut: Dār al-Andalus, 1963), pp. 27-39.

²³Ḥusām al-Khaṭīb, al-Riwāyah al-Sūrīyah fī Marḥalat al-Nuhūd (Damascus: Maṭba'at al-Jabalāwī, 1975), p. 17.

²⁴ʿAdil Abū Shanab, Ṣafahāt Majhūlah min Tārīkh

al-Qiṣṣah fī Sūriyah (Damascus: Manshūrāt Wizārat al-Thaqāfah, 1974), p. 132.

²⁵Laylā Ba'albakī was born in 1938 in Southern Lebanon in a traditional Muslim family of the Shī'ite sect. She studied philosophy at St. Joseph University, but she interrupted her university education by working as a secretary in the Lebanese Parliament. Her first novel Anā ahyā (I live) was translated into French and other European languages, and compared by critics to the work of Françoise Sagan. After getting married, her literary productivity diminished. Elizabeth Warnock Fernea and Basima Qattan Bezirgan, eds., Middle Eastern Muslim Women Speak (Texas: University of Texas Press, 1977), p. 273.

²⁶See the introduction in Laylā Ba'albakī, al-Ālihah al-Mamsūkhah (Beirut: Dār Majallat Shi'r, 1965), no pagination.

²⁷Idem, Anā Ahyā (Beirut: Dār Majallat Shi'r, 1963), p. 158.

²⁸See the detailed court accounts in E.W. Fernea and B.Q. Bezirgan, Middle Eastern, pp. 280-9; see also "Difā'an 'an al-Ḥurriyah: Laylā Ba'albakī," Ḥiwār, vol. 2, nos. 5 & 6 (September/October, 1964), 176-82.

²⁹The translation is mine. For a slightly different translation; see E.W. Fernea and B.Q. Bezirgan, Middle Eastern, p. 280.

³⁰Laylā Ba'albakī, Safīnat Ḥanān ilā al-Qamar (Beirut: Dār Majallat Shi'r, 1964), p. 21.

³¹Ghālī Shukrī, Ghādah al-Sammān bilā Ajniḥah (Beirut: Dār al-Ṭalī'ah, 1977), p. 185; see also Najlā' Ḥamid, "Ḥawl al-Adab al-Nisā'ī" al-Risālah, vol. 22, no. 1082 (October, 1964), 26-8.

³²Ibid., p. 185.

³³Ibid., pp. 79-80.

³⁴Ibid., pp. 15-6.

³⁵Ibid., p. 79.

³⁶Muḥyī al-Dīn Ṣubḥī, 'Awālim min al-Takhyīl (Damas-cus: Manshūrāt Wizārat al-Thaqāfah, 1974), pp. 91-113.

³⁷'Afīf Farrāj, al-Ḥurriyah fī Adab al-Mar'ah (Bei-rut: Dār al-Fārābī, 1975), p. 67.

³⁸George Ṭarābishī, Sharq wā Gharb: Rujūlah wa Unūthah (Beirut: Dār al-Ṭalī'ah, 1977), p. 6.

³⁹Idem, al-Adab min al-Dākhil (Beirut: Dār al-Ṭalī'ah, 1978), p. 11.

⁴⁰Idem, Sharq wa Gharb, p. 11. For more details, see his article, "al-Istilāb fī al-Riwāyah al-Nisā'īyah al-'Arabīyah," al-Ādāb 11 (March, 1963), 43-9.

⁴¹Edward al-Kharrāṭ is a modern Egyptian writer who was born in Alexandria in 1926. He published a number of short stories and articles in different journals, the most important of which is Ḥiṭān 'Āliyah (High Walls) in 1958. He received a writing-award in 1969. In 1979 he published his novel Ramah wa al-Tinnīn which represents a new style and experience in modern novels in the Arab

world. He is also a well-known trained critic who held many seminars in London criticizing the Egyptian writers and intellectuals after the Arab defeat of 1967. My personal interview in 1979.

⁴²I met Mr. al-Kharrāt in Oxford, England, in June, 1979 several times when he was giving a number of seminars on modern fiction at Oxford and London universities while I was a student and a correspondent for al-Sha'b (a daily newspaper in Jerusalem). During this period I had a long and detailed interview with him concerning his experience as a writer and his understanding of several related issues.

⁴³The interview took place in Cairo, Sheraton Hotel, August 15, 1975. It was published in Amman's daily newspaper al-Ra'y [ca. 10-20] October, 1975, and in Jerusalem's daily newspaper al-Sha'b [ca. 10-15] November, 1975.

⁴⁴'Alyā' al-Dālātī, Lan Aqtul Waṭanī (Beirut: Dār al-Masīrah, 1977), p. 37.

⁴⁵Ghādah al-Sammān, Raḥīl al-Marāfi' al-Qadīmah, 3d ed. (Beirut: Manshūrāt Ghādah al-Sammān, 1978), p. 15.

⁴⁶For general information and views on women's issues, see Mawāqif 28 (Summer, 1974), 110-20.

⁴⁷Ibid., 110, 112.

⁴⁸Ibid., 113-4.

⁴⁹Bū 'Alī Yāsīn and Nabīl Sulaymān, al-Adab wa al-Idiyūlūjiyā fī Sūriyah (Beirut: Dār Ibn Khaldūn, 1974), p. 91.

⁵⁰A. Farrāj, al-Ḥurriyah, p. 67.

⁵¹G. Shukrī, Ghādah al-Sammān, p. 80.

⁵²Ibid., p. 111.

⁵³Evelyne Accad, Veil of Shame: The Role of Women in the Contemporary Fiction of North Africa and the Arab World (Sherbrooke: Naaman de Sherbrooke, 1978), p. 94.

CHAPTER II

GHĀDAH AL-SAMMĀN: HER LIFE AND BACKGROUND

Ghādah Aḥmad al-Sammān was born in 1942 in the village of al-Shāmīyah near Damascus.¹ Still a child when her mother Salmā Ruwayḥah died, the responsibility of raising her was left in the hands of her father, Dr. Aḥmad al-Sammān.² In several of her interviews, al-Sammān describes her father as a strong, self-made man whose ambition led him to become a university professor, Dean of the Faculty of Law, and Minister of Education. A distinguished public figure, Dr. al-Sammān is associated, to a certain extent, with the formation of Syrian society after independence in 1945. In addition to the writing of Syrian laws, he was responsible for the establishment of several economic and social regulations, and was one of the key figures in policy decisions during the 1958 union between Syria and Egypt.³

Although al-Sammān grew up in a poor village, the education, wealth and position of her father set her apart from the other village children; this separate and somewhat preferential upbringing had a profound effect on her thinking and later development as a writer.

During the early stages of her education, super-

vised closely by her father, al-Sammān was taught Arabic and French as well as the basic principles of the Islamic religion.⁴ It is clear that Dr. al-Sammān's guidance and encouragement during his daughter's elementary education gave her self-confidence which ultimately led to her development as a distinguished writer.

Ghāḍah al-Sammān's intelligence and writing ability appeared while she was a young high school student. With the encouragement of her Arabic teacher, she wrote several short stories for the school's literary magazine.⁵ Her interest in Arabic literature was the basic motivation for her desire to spend much of her time reading and writing. In 1962, at the age of twenty, she published a collection of short stories under the title 'Aynāk Qadarī', followed by several short stories, novels, and articles.

Because of the conservative character of Arab culture and the Islamic tradition, very few women have had the courage to assert their independence and individuality in a male-dominated society. Al-Sammān is one of those few women who, with innate intelligence, talent, and the help of a wealthy, supportive background, opened an era that will remain a landmark of women's demand for freedom and liberation for years to come. As will be discussed later, her views about sex, liberation and women's rights are

among the most controversial social issues in Arabic literature up to the present time.

In her writings al-Sammān has, on many occasions, harshly criticized the bourgeoisie, despite the fact that she herself was a member of this class, and is undoubtedly influenced by it. This is also evident in the fact that her characters in her first works are usually chosen from this class. As for members of the lower class, her experience with them was very limited and not deep enough to gain any real understanding of their life circumstances and emotions. Consequently, her literature deals with them in this period in only a minor way with insufficient detail to express the reality of their existence. But in her later works she shows more awareness and understanding of their reality and sheds more light on the relationship between the élite of the political system and the poor in the Arab world.

Al-Sammān as a woman can be described as a strong, well-educated personality who is able to touch on various controversial issues within Arab society. Despite the restrictions imposed on women by tradition in this society, she was one of the few women to come forward and raise her voice against them. Her views on many of the social issues were a challenge even to her father who, at times, tried

to prevent her from being aggressive in a society dominated by men. In one of her interviews, she admits that:

Despite the fact that my father treated me strictly, ... as an adolescent I was ill-tempered and a challenger. I had a serious conflict with him at one time because he obliged me to study science in order to become a doctor. Although I did not like it, I completed my baccalaureate, but changed to English Literature afterwards.⁶

After her baccalaureate, al-Sammān worked as a librarian and as a teacher of English in a secondary school near Damascus. In 1961, she joined the University of Damascus and graduated with a B.A. degree in English literature.⁷ She later moved to Lebanon and obtained a Master's degree in English literature at the American University of Beirut. While in Beirut, she taught at school, then moved on to journalism which has become her profession ever since.

After the death of her father in 1966, the Syrian government issued a judgement by default to al-Sammān which stated that she was subject to a three-month jail term because she had left Syria without the government's permission.⁸ She subsequently left Lebanon for Europe where she spent the period 1967-1969 travelling in many Western countries.⁹ This period added vital experience and confidence to the per-

sonality of the young woman, as well as taught her an important lesson in personal independence. During her stay in Europe, she took the opportunity to study Western culture and traditions. This is clearly reflected in her present philosophy and personality. Her travelling period, combined with the problem she faced with the Syrian government, allowed her to distinguish her real friends in the Arab world. Many of these were among the leading literary figures, like Ghassān Kanafānī who helped in obtaining an Arab travelling document for her. There was also a Syrian lawyer who defended her until she received her pardon from the present Syrian President Ḥāfiẓ al-Asad. In addition, there were other friends who helped her in some way but whom she refused to name, probably because they are still alive.¹⁰

In most of her writings, al-Sammān has shown considerable concern for the role of women in the Arab world. She calls for the liberation of women from the restrictions of tradition, and views the liberation movement as a fundamental aspect of all social issues in the Arab world.¹¹ She feels that any revolution which does not touch on human rights, including women's causes, can be regarded as a failure. In her view, the sexual revolution

is an integral part of the revolution that every individual in the Arab world must achieve. The sexual revolution, according to her, must go hand in hand with the current social, political, and economic revolution. As for the practical achievement of women's participation and equal rights in society, she suggests a constant struggle against the traditional ideas that govern the social structure and she calls for a continuous moral fight against the bourgeois concept of freedom which in her view reflects the values and principles of Arab society. It is important to note, however, that her voice against tradition originates from her awareness and understanding of the social issues that exist within society and the role that women play in the evolution of the new society. She is also a strong believer in "existentialism" and, to some extent, was influenced by many of the writers who belong to this school including Sartre, Camus, and Kafka.

Al-Sammān's past and present views on sex and women's issues were not published, however, without condemnation by members of her own society. For the dramatic shock that her opinions and writings caused in a traditional society, it is not surprising that she was accused of being mentally ill, and many in the society looked upon her as an "imra'ah hālik" (a fallen woman).¹² This, in turn,

forced her to leave her own country and live as an outsider beyond the oppression of the institutions of her own society.

With respect to her political views, al-Sammān does not stand on a clear political base. In many of her writings, she deals with political issues but she does not clearly belong to a specific political ideology. This may be due to her real interest in the form of the social structure as a whole of which the political system is only a part. Perhaps one of the political issues that affected her most was the Arab defeat in 1967.¹³ In several of her interviews, she blamed the Arabs themselves for the defeat and believed that it reflected various social, economic, and political aspects of Arab society.

As previously noted, al-Sammān's works may be divided into two stages. In the first stage (1961-1967), her writings consisted of short stories and articles published in different magazines. Among the stories published during this period are 'Aynāk Qadari' (1962), 'Lā Baḥr fī Bayrūt' (1963), and 'Layl al-Ghurabā' (1966). In the first book, she began to be more open in dealing with such issues (as sex, the liberation of women, and life and death.

'Aynāk Qadari' (Your Eyes Are My Fate; Beirut, 1962) was the first of al-Sammān's works to be published. It included a collection of sixteen short

stories, and takes its title from the first story in the collection. The main themes discussed in this book are those of love and life. Representing her early start in writing, the publication was dedicated to her father, as it was he who taught her how to struggle against her fate. In the first story, "Aynāk Qadarī", she expresses her feelings as a woman trapped or oppressed by her love, as illustrated in this excerpt from the end of the story:

"Your eyes are my fate. I cannot escape from them. They are everywhere. Your eyes are my fate. No one can escape his fate. Oh! 'Imād."¹⁴

This same theme of the entrapment by one's love and social relations is repeated in another story in the collection entitled "Rajul fī al-Zuqāq" (A Man in the Lane). Because her upbringing and relationship with her father were similar to those of the main character of the story, I believe that she was writing about herself and her submission to her father until she was fourteen. In this respect she says: "The fact that I am a woman is shameful, a shame which is unforgivable. In the swelling of my bosom there is a betrayal of my friendship with my father."¹⁵ She vividly portrays adolescent feelings, imagination, and conduct in her description of a girl watching her beloved man through the window, without knowing him personally.

She also very clearly describes the rebellious yet intelligent adolescent that she herself was by having the character reject the man as soon as he comes to visit her parents. It is at this point that the heroine decides to go to university, expressing herself in "urīd" (I want) to her father. My assumption here about the relationship between the story's character and al-Sammān is based on the previously noted interview in which she described a similar adolescent relationship with her father.¹⁶

After the first collection, al-Sammān published Lā Baḥr fī Bayrūt (No Sea in Beirut; Beirut, 1963), in which she chose her characters to represent her own feelings in life. In this book, she describes the relationships between men and women as dishonest to the extent that she asks--in "La'nat al-Laḥm al-Asmar" (Curse of the Brown Flesh)--whether there is a man who can understand a woman through her feelings and thoughts and not through her body.¹⁷ In my opinion, the subjects which she dealt with in this book are an expression of the educated Arab's loss and instability due largely to social and political oppression. This is evident especially in her story entitled "Ghajariyah bilā Marfa'" (A Gypsy without a Port of Call).

Al-Sammān's next collection of short stories, Layl al-Ghurabā' (Foreigners' Night; Beirut, 1966), can be

seen as representative of a new dimension in her writing and thinking. In this book, she, for the first time, begins to have some understanding of the principal political Arab causes in general and the Palestinian problem in particular. Also in this book, she comments on the experience and emotional confusion of the educated Arabs living in Western society. She feels that the natives of Arab and Western cultures cannot really live together and love each other because the stricter and more inflexible traditions and values of Arab society cannot co-exist with the looser and more permissive morals of Western culture.

Throughout this theme, she tried to introduce new elements into her writings by dealing with issues related to the social and political attitudes of the individual Arabs. These new elements can also be noticed in her story "Yā Dimashq" (Oh! Damascus), in which she expresses her compassion for her homeland in a romantic style.

In the second stage (1967-1975), al-Sammān moves from an involvement in narrow issues to broader writing related to various social, political, and economic issues.

The defeat of 1967 in the Arab world opened a new era, in which many writers, including al-Sammān, began to discuss issues arising from that defeat. Like everyone else, she took the defeat with great pain and felt it was

her responsibility as an Arab to participate in the new stage that followed the war. This commitment was evident in her writings after the war, as they involved articles and short stories which concentrated on critical descriptions of Arab society after the defeat. In her collection Raḥīl al-Marāfi' al-Qadīmah she criticized the governments of the Arab world for their dishonesty and insincerity. She held these governments responsible for the defeat of the Arab world and for the death of so many Arabs who were innocent victims of the governments' stupidity.

In her second story in this collection, "Ḥarīq dhālik al-Ṣayf" (The Fire of that Summer), al-Sammān moves from particular issues to more general ones, including a variety of political problems. She conceives of the entire Arab world as a graveyard, and of the Arab people as residents in tombs.¹⁸ In my opinion, this is a very generalized idea and does not truly reflect the reality of Arab society. I believe that she confuses the opposing sides in this issue in that she does not fully differentiate between the governing parties or individuals who hold power on the one hand and the common people who are left powerless on the other. Among the latter, there exist a great number of people who are ready to sacrifice

their lives for the sake of the Arab cause.

In another story of this collection, "al-Dānūb al-Ramādī" (The Grey Danube) is a continuation of this theme in that it urges Arabs to establish land as their first priority, that is, they should devote their attention to their land first, and only then concern themselves with the dignity and honour of their women.¹⁹

It is to be noted that most of the characters in this collection of stories have psychological crises: they are sick, tired, and lost as a result of the defeat of June 1967. Stories in this collection have been rightly called "Qışaş Ḥazīrānīyah" (June Stories), because their main theme is the Arab defeat, the cause of which al-Sammān explains through her characters. This does not mean, however, that she suddenly dedicated her work to political concern; on the contrary, she continued to write on themes of love and life in this collection. In the same year, a few months after the publication of Raḥīl al-Marāfi' al-Qadīmah, she produced Ḥubb (Love; Beirut, 1973), a collection of forty-one articles and stories written between the years 1960-1973 which deal with a variety of issues related to the periods before and after 1967 but concentrating mainly on love. Some of these articles had been previously published under pseudonyms in various journals.

In her next work, a novel entitled Bayrūt 75 (Beirut, 1975), al-Sammān attempts to describe the socio-political life in Beirut. Its main characters are five persons chosen to present different levels in society who meet in a taxi travelling from Damascus to Beirut. Briefly, there are two young people, Yāsamīnah--a girl who wants to live; Farah--an employee delivering a letter to his rich relative Nīshān; the others are Abū al-Mallā who lets his daughter work in a rich house; Ṭi'ān the pharmacist, and Abū Muṣṭafā, the fisherman. These figures all reach their destinations and then proceed to engage in activities which al-Sammān uses to comment on the misery and complexity of the human condition in Beirut.

Farah ironically becomes famous as the great "Muṭ-rib al-Rujūlah" (Singer for Manhood), despite the fact that he actually "lost" his manhood when he became involved in a sexual relationship with Nīshān. Yāsamīnah, in turn, loses her honour as a result of her involvement with a rich man, Namir, and thus loses the ability to write. Al-Sammān uses the incident of Namir leaving Yāsamīnah in order to marry a woman of his own class to illustrate how class distinction is still a very real determinant in Middle Eastern life. It is also with this incident that Yāsamīnah is forced to choose between poverty and prostitution. Her

brother, who actually benefitted from her relationship as mistress to Namir, murders Yāsāmīnah when she finally comes to him asking for money and pretends that he killed her for the sake of her honour.

Al-Sammān uses the final destiny of Farah and his actions as a symbol of her perception of Beirut life and society. After seeing Yāsāmīnah's funeral, he goes mad, dressing in women's clothes and imagining himself as Yāsāmīnah's widower, as he had previously thought of marrying her. He imagined the funeral ceremony, re-living it over and over again in his mind; he imagined that Yāsāmīnah stood up in her coffin, advanced charmingly toward him and took off her clothes. He was finally judged as mad, and placed in the sanitarium. He managed to escape, however, took the hospital sign and placed it on the outskirts of Beirut to replace the sign welcoming people to Beirut. He then said:

I exploded with laughter while I was reading the sign and behind the sign was Beirut appearing in the dawn like the viscera of an infernal monster ready to attack, and I escaped returning to my quiet den.²⁰

This, briefly, is the first theme of the novel. The other is the description of the life of the poor; the fisherman Abū Muṣṭafā's son 'Alī was drowned while he was

fishing, but upon his return home, he finds his wife giving birth to another child whom they name after their dead son. Abū Mallā's life is also portrayed as a government guard of a collection of ancient statues in his shanty. He spends all his life accepting his fate and observing his prayers regularly. He is a poor man, however, and this poverty forces him to send three of his daughters to work in the houses of the wealthy people in Lebanon, contrasted with the corrugated iron sheet walls of his Beirut shanty. His dilemma is centered on the ancient statues he keeps as artifacts. They are very valuable and he thinks of selling them to save his daughters from having to work in the houses of the rich. But he keeps remembering the statement of the engineer at the excavation site who told him that the statues were "monuments of your country, Lebanon. Extract them carefully, and protect them from theft and destruction during the excavation. It is part of your history."²¹ He wonders then how he can take pride in the history of his land while his daughters are working in the houses of the rich people. He looks at these valuable statues every day in his home and, as time goes on, he begins to shout salutations to them whenever he comes in, as if he has a deep relation with them. He thus refuses to sell them for 10,000 liras. He eventually develops

a friendship with the statues which causes psychological struggles in his mind. One day he imagines a statue choking him, a delusion which kills him. This occurrence happens while his family are watching television on a neighbour's set. When they come home, they find him dead. His son comes in and thinks that his father had a heart attack. However, the son finds a trace of smothering on his neck and thinks it to be the result of his father's attempt to loosen the button of his shirt collar.

The fifth character Ti'an, was graduated from a famous faculty of pharmacy at the university. He decided to return to Lebanon to start his own professional establishment. He sent a telegram to his family informing them of his arrival. At the airport, he found a member of his family armed because his cousin had killed Mur'ib, a man from another tribe. Because the dead Mur'ib had attained a university degree, his tribe decided to avenge him by killing anyone in Ti'an's tribe who had also attained a university degree--in this case, Ti'an himself. This idea of being a wanted person haunted Ti'an whenever he walked on the street, eventually causing him to kill a stranger, a man he merely imagined was following him.²²

A'lantu 'alayk al-Hubb (I Declare My Love to You; Beirut, 1976), is an example of yet another kind of

writing by al-Sammān for it is written in a poetic style which differs from that of her other works. In the exchange of romantic relations among the characters in A'lantu 'alayk al-Ḥubb, al-Sammān shows us her deep understanding of human relations, her increasing maturity as a writer, and her talent to express both. "A'lantu 'alayk al-Ḥubb" is an example of style which is unique to the author. It is neither prose nor poetry but a sort of free verse at least in its structure. The author uses the terminology of war to express love, passion and forgiveness.

Cruelty was your sin
and pride was mine,
when the two sins came together
their offspring was hellish separation.
Often did I resolve that when we part
I would aim my bullet at your voice
I would tie the corpse of your memory
to a marble column,
burn it as they burnt the sorcerers and their evil art.
But today since we parted
I think of you with tenderness
and sadness filled with purity,
like the whispering of the desert to the mirage.
To part or not to part
I declare my love to you
I declare my peace to you
I declare my passion to you
I declare my pardon to you

nor do I regret

for I have spent my flesh and my spirit for you.²³

As Bayrūt 75 ends, the artistic expression moves from reality to fantasy, a movement which prepares the reader for the "nightmarishness" of al-Sammān's next book, Kawābīs Bayrūt (Nightmares of Beirut; Beirut, 1976). It is to be noted, however, that the source of these nightmares varies in the sense that the latter book draws on life itself whereas the former draws on the historical record.

Kawābīs Bayrūt does not depend upon a specific event since all of the events are important in the development of the action and characters in the novel. On the surface, it appears that the action revolves around one particular event, but a deeper look reveals the complexity of the plot and shows that the one event is really several events intertwined. Kawābīs Bayrūt thus becomes al-Sammān herself in action. The novel presents her own views as well as her own actions during the Lebanese civil war. However, it is more than a simple recording of events and thoughts as in a personal diary; it is rather the author revealing herself at the conscious and subconscious levels of her perception of the real as distinct from the imaginary.

The setting of the story is a pet-shop which symbolizes the situation in Beirut, the owner representing the oppressors--the government authorities and feudalists--and the pets, the people of Beirut. The narrator plays a very important role in the story in that she participates in every single action the characters undertake. One observes that the behaviour of people and the government authorities is mirrored in the relations between the pet-shop owner and the animals, all described by al-Sammān in terms of her own value judgements.

One interesting point of Kawābīs Bayrūt is that there is no central character having the role of the protagonist. Rather, the narrator embodies that role along with Death which appears as a symbolic character. Death, we are told, chooses an imaginary heroine whose name is Beirut (The Bride of the East).²⁴ Within this metaphoric context, it does not seem strange to the reader when al-Sammān personifies Death and Beirut; nor does it seem unnatural that these two figures are linked by fatal destiny. It is difficult, however, to understand just how Death lives and Beirut dies within the context of the novel.

Time in Kawābīs Bayrūt is very fragmented indicating the rapidity of the development of events in the novel.

It is broken into weeks, days, and at times even minutes and seconds. Throughout the struggle between the setting and the characters in the story, al-Sammān pierces the shell of every ill in Lebanese society, if not Arab society as a whole. She states the reality as she sees it and appeals for loyalty to the homeland. She appeals for unity and criticizes the various political and religious factions²⁵ and she calls for social justice and defends the rights of the poor.

The war issue is clearly one of the central themes of this novel as it appears in every single kābūs (nightmare). Through each of the "nightmares" al-Sammān discusses the factors and events which led to the civil war and records the events of the war as they developed. In her opinion, the factors which led to the Lebanese civil war are religious strife, poverty, class struggle, and feudalism.²⁶ In describing the results of the war, the author does not come to a final conclusion with regard to the conflict. She uses this technique because she, in effect, expects a continuation of the war. An excellent illustration of the author's pessimism and vivid portrayal of the madness and anxiety that is Beirut during the civil strife can be seen in the following quotation:

I saw the man exit out of the heart of darkness,

I saw the man put a black mask on his face. I saw the man knock on the big door. I saw the man meet the Big Man. I saw the transaction being completed. I saw the man exit carrying with him the "powder of madness". I saw the man receive the price. I saw the man climb the mountains. I saw the man throw "the powder of madness" in Beirut's water main. I saw the powder touch the water and the fire burn in the water and blow bubbles like cinders. I saw the man kneel over the water and drink, and his ten fingers turn into an animal's claws, and his hair grow long and his clothes fall off of him like a dry peel, and his body come out of it as if it were the body of an angry gorilla. The gorilla extends his hand to break a green branch, and carries it excitedly running towards the city, and the fire burns from his feet, and inside him burns an irresistible animalistic volcano and a thirst for blood . . . blood. And the "spring of madness" floods to quench the thirst of the city, of which some drink unknowingly.²⁷

It is interesting to note that al-Sammān placed herself under a great deal of pressure to complete Kawā-bis Bayrūt as she started writing on December 13, 1975 and completed it two months later on February 26, 1976. Before coming out in book form, one hundred and sixty of the "nightmares" appeared in serial form in one of the Lebanese weekly magazines until it ceased publication in August 1976.²⁸

Al-Sammān's next work al-A'māl ghayr al-Kāmilah

(The Incomplete Works; Beirut, 1978-80), is a series which includes different literary genres, articles, book reviews, travel accounts, social and political analyses. In addition, there are some sentimental writings in a poetic style. The series consist of thirteen volumes of which nine are already published. In her introduction, she states that these volumes were to be published after her death, and that the Lebanese Civil War obliged her to collect these materials. In explaining the title (incomplete works), she says that all human works are incomplete.²⁹

The first volume, Zaman al-Hubb al-Ākhir (The Time of the Last Love; Beirut, 1978), is composed of seven short stories. Before the compilation of these stories into one book, most were published in various magazines. Some of these stories were written in her early period and can therefore be classified under the first stage of her writings. Most of the stories are listed according to the subject and date of writing, beginning with the most recent ones.

The second volume of these incomplete works is entitled al-Jasad Haqībat Safar (The Body is a Travelling Bag; Beirut, 1979). It consists of eighty-three articles, and represents al-Sammān's experiences while

she was a tourist in several Arab and European countries. Here she describes the places she visited, expresses the unhappiness of being an outsider, and offers a critical analysis of the cultural differences between Arab and Western societies in this context. Among the articles in which she specifically deals with these subjects are those of al-Usbū' al-'Arabī and al-Hawādith.

The third book in the series, al-Sibāḥah fī Buhayrat al-Shayṭan (Swimming in the Devil's Lake; Beirut, 1979), contains a number of articles dealing with human mental capacities and abilities as well as reviews of several books on psychology and medicine. Many of her articles are given titles related to drugs, magic, and madness; others bear the names of various psychological states. In the same way, she writes about the devil (shayṭān) and about the cultures of other planets. These articles are based on her personal experiences as well as on her study and interest in these particular fields. I find this volume particularly interesting as it includes different subjects which set it apart from her other publications.

The fourth book in the series, Khatm al-Dhākirah bi-al-Sham' al-Aḥmar (Stamping the Memory with Red Sealing Wax; Beirut, 1979), consists of articles which explain her painful longing for Syria, the country which

she left, as well as other sentimental and passionate writings. Most of these articles were written in the 1970's and were published in different newspapers among which were: al-Usbū' al-'Arabī, al-Ḥawādith, al-Kifāh, al-Ma'rifah, and al-Wahdah.

The fifth book, I'tiqāl Lahẓah Ḥaribah (Capturing a Fleeing Moment; Beirut, 1979), contains sentimental writings which belong much more to the poetic genre than to prose. In it she expresses her feelings and records past memories. She uses the word i'tiqāl (capture) at the beginning of the titles of each of her articles, such as "I'tiqāl Qashshah fī Kumm Qamīṣ" (Capturing a Straw on a Shirt Sleeve), etc. Her uncommon titles sometimes hardly reflect the contents of the story and are evidence of her luxurious imagination. These articles were published in al-Usbū' al-'Arabī, and al-Thawrah.

The sixth book of this collection bears the title Muwāṭinah Mutalabbisah bi al-Qirā'ah (Compatriot Caught Red-Handed in Reading; Beirut, 1979). It is a study of a group of literary figures who played important roles in enriching international literature. These articles are classified in three parts. The first one contains a number of articles which deal with human affairs in certain famous plays. The second, entitled "al-Ṣayf Baṭal hādhihī

al-Qiṣaṣ" (Summer is the Hero of these Stories), presents us with a study of some writings which focus on the theme of summer. Among these writings are Albert Camus' L'Etranger, William Shakespeare's Midsummer Night's Dream, Tennessee Williams' The Night of the Iguana, and Anton Chekhov's The Seagull. The third part, entitled "al-Ḥarb Baṭal hādhihī al-Qiṣaṣ" (War is the Hero of these Stories), presents a study of some writings which focus on the theme of war. Among these writings are: André Malraux, La Condition Humaine, and Charles Dickens, A Tale of Two Cities. This part is followed by a number of studies of some works concerning different themes such as: love, war, destiny, marriage, science, and politics. Among these works are: Nena and George O'Neill, Open Marriage; Erich Segal, Love Story; Mario Puzo, The Dark Arena; Richard Bach, Jonathan Livingston Seagull; Pierre Salinger, For the Eyes of the President Only.

In 1980, al-Sammān published al-Raghīf Yanbiḍ ka al-Qalb (The Loaf Beats like the Heart; Beirut, 1980), which is a collection of essays previously published in newspapers. These essays deal with the social climate in Lebanon and shed light on the class differences in different social settings such as: al-Biqā', 'Akkār, Beirut, and the South. In these essays, al-Sammān also writes

about the aspirations and ambitions of certain progressive groups in Lebanese society. The loaf here is a symbol of survival as can be seen in passages such as the following which appear throughout the collection:

Inside the hot bakery I stand. The sweat pours from the youth who pushes the loaf into the oven. . . . The loaf grows quietly and fast inside the bakery, just like revolutions. The loaf that grows under the red flame looks like a beating heart. All these loaves under the red flames and through the raging heat look like a beating heart. I am not surprised when the youth tells me that he is an evening student, and when he tells me about his family (twelve persons), struggling for a piece of the loaf, for a piece of sun, and for a piece of education. I feel his hatred beat like a loaf, like a heart.³⁰

This book speaks of actual persons whom the writer avoids describing in detail.

- 'Ayn. Ghayn. Tatafarras ('Ayn. Ghayn. Scrutinizes; Beirut, 1980) contains close scrutinies of literary and humanitarian issues. Some of the literary essays are interviews with and studies of writers such as Ṭahā Ḥusayn and Jibrān. Some of the humanitarian essays deal with issues like crime, law, and love. The book title applies to every essay in the book such as: "'Ayn. Ghayn. Tatafarras fī al-Būm" ('Ayn. Ghayn. Scrutinizing the Owl) and

"'Ayn. Ghayn. Tatafarras fī al-Jarīmah" ('Ayn. Ghayn. Scrutinizing Crime). Al-Sammān dedicates this book to the owl, claiming that the owl is a gentle creature and not as cruel as many think.

Ṣuffārat Indhār dākhil Ra'sī (A Warning Siren inside My Head; Beirut, 1980), is a collection of essays that deal with political and social issues in Lebanon between 1964-1974. It is different from the previous two books in the amount of suffering and anguish it contains. Besides articles on the social ills of Lebanon, however, the book also contains essays on women, the Arab-Israeli conflict, and others.

All three of these collections were previously published in al-Uṣbū' al-'Arabī and al-Hawādith.

To summarize, I have attempted to draw a broad outline of Ghādah al-Sammān's contributions to Arab women's literature. I have indicated that al-Sammān has been actively writing since 1961, her works consisting of both long and short stories, novels, poetic writings, articles, and a large number of interviews published in various newspapers, magazines and journals. It is to be noted, however, that her work has not followed a single literary style. As she matured as a writer and a person, her style and choice of issues changed from narrow concentration on

specifically romantic themes to include broader social, economic and political issues. In addition, the experience she gained by travelling to different countries gave her an insight into social realities and a better understanding of women's position in the Arab world. It is important to remember that a great deal of her time and effort was spent defending women's rights in sex, freedom, and equality. Her openness on these issues in a society still governed by traditional ideas did not pass unnoticed, however; she was subjected to abuse and criticism by many individuals and groups in her own society. But her courage and personality provided her with the means to continue making her views in support of women known to all.

Many of al-Sammān's writings can thus be viewed as a reflection of the position now held by women in Middle East society and a struggle to improve it. They call on every educated Arab to participate in a revolution of consciousness to view women as human beings with feelings and desires, capable of taking part in building the new Arab society.

Al-Sammān, like any other Arab individual, was influenced by the political and social changes that Arab society experienced during the past twenty years. This is clearly evident in her writings in which her ideas and

focus completely change after the tumultuous experience of 1967. In the post-1967 period, it is clear that she entered a new stage of political and social awareness, as most of her works in this period are rather politically oriented, dealing with the painful experience of the 1967 defeat, the conflict in Lebanon in the seventies, and the social change needed in all the Arab world.

NOTES

¹E.W. Fernea and B.Q. Bezirgan, Middle Eastern, p. 391.

²Muḥyī al-Dīn Ṣubḥī, Muṭārahāt fī Fann al-Qawl (Damascus: Manshūrāt Ittiḥād al-Kuttāb al-‘Arab, 1978), p. 149.

³Ibid.

⁴Gh. Shukrī, Ghādah al-Sammān, p. 29.

⁵Ibid., p. 35.

⁶Ibid., p. 30.

⁷Ibid., pp. 30-1; E.W. Fernea and B.Q. Bezirgan, Middle Eastern, p. 391.

⁸Gh. Shukrī, Ghādah al-Sammān, p. 41.

⁹Ibid., p. 42.

¹⁰Ibid., pp. 41-2.

¹¹See E.W. Fernea and B.Q. Bezirgan, Middle Eastern, p. 392; M.D. Ṣubḥī, Muṭārahāt, pp. 162-3; Gh. Shukrī, Ghādah al-Sammān, p. 33.

¹²Gh. Shukrī, Ghādah al-Sammān, p. 42; M.D. Ṣubḥī, Muṭārahāt, p. 150.

¹³The Arab defeat of 1967 influenced many other fiction writers in the Arab world. For more detail on

this subject, see Shukrī 'Azīz Maqī, In'ikās Hazīmat Hazīrān 'alā al-Riwāyah al-'Arabīyah (Beirut: al-Mu'assasah al-'Arabīyah li-al-Dirāsah wa al-Nashr, 1978).

¹⁴Ghādah al-Sammān, 'Aynāk Qadarī, 5th ed. (Beirut: Manshūrāt Ghādah al-Sammān, 1979), p. 20.

¹⁵Ibid., p. 91.

¹⁶Gh. Shukrī, Ghādah al-Sammān, p. 30.

¹⁷Ghādah al-Sammān, Lā Baḥr fī Bayrūt, 4th ed. (Beirut: Manshūrāt Ghādah al-Sammān, 1978), pp. 20-2.

¹⁸Idem, Raḥīl al-Marāfi' al-Qadīmah, 3d ed. (Beirut: Manshūrāt Ghādah al-Sammān, 1978), pp. 78, 82.

¹⁹Ibid., pp. 22, 36-7.

²⁰Idem, Bayrūt 75, 2d ed. (Beirut: Manshūrāt Ghādah al-Sammān, 1977), p. 108.

²¹Ibid., p. 67.

²²Ibid., p. 62.

²³Idem, A'lantu 'alayk al-Ḥubb, 3d ed. (Beirut: Manshūrāt Ghādah al-Sammān, 1978), pp. 92-3.

²⁴Originally Beirut was known as Berytus, famous for its school which existed in the third century A.D. and probably for some time earlier. When Justinian closed the school of philosophy and law in Athens in 525, he confined the study of jurisprudence in the East to Constantinople and Berytus. He recognized the course of study making his new codification the basis of the curriculum to be pursued in a logical sequence of five years.

Berytus was destroyed by an earthquake in 554. The Encyclopedia Americana 3 (1951), 584. Hitti refers to the classical name of Beirut and adds: "The city was designated Julia Augusta Felix Berytus in honour of Augustus' daughter." For more details, see Philip K. Hitti, A Short History of Lebanon (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1965), pp. 73-9.

²⁵For more information concerning political and religious parties in Lebanon, see Jean Larteguy, Dieu, l'or et le sang (Paris: Presses de la Cité, 1980), pp. 126-57; Anṭūn Buṭrus. Wathīqat Ḥarb Lubnān, vol. 1 (Beirut: Markaz al-Abḥāth wa al-Dirāsāt wa al-Maḥfūẓāt fī Dār al-Ṣayyād, 1977), pp. 492-524.

²⁶Ghādah al-Sammān, Kawābīs Bayrūt, 2d ed. (Beirut: Manshūrāt Ghādah al-Sammān, 1976), pp. 51, 232-4.

²⁷Ibid., p. 20.

²⁸Ghādah al-Sammān did not mention the name of this magazine.

²⁹Ghādah al-Sammān, al-A'māl ghayr al-Kāmilah: Zaman al-Ḥubb al-Ākhir (Beirut: Manshūrāt Ghādah al-Sammān, 1978), p. 6.

³⁰Idem, al-A'māl ghayr al-Kāmilah: al-Raghīf Yanbiḍ ka-al-Qalb (Beirut: Manshūrāt Ghādah al-Sammān, 1980), p. 46.

CHAPTER III

AL-SAMMĀN'S PRE-1967 WORKS

In analyzing Ghādah al-Sammān's pre-1967 works, one is confronted with a myriad of images and characters depicting the author's opinions on the oppression of Arab women in male-female relationships, on love, on death, on being lost, on class consciousness, and on East-West cultural differences. Throughout her books and short stories of this period, al-Sammān's vivid imagery and symbolism give her readers some understanding of the depth and intensity of her frustration, pessimism and isolation, particularly in terms of her existentialist beliefs. It is the expression of these opinions and emotions in 'Aynāk Qadarī, Lā Baḥr fī Bayrūt, and Layl al-Ghurabā' which we will examine in this chapter.

The highly-charged issue of women's position in Middle Eastern society is clearly of overriding importance in al-Sammān's novels and short stories. Over and over again, al-Sammān criticizes, laments, and laughs at the inferior position of the Arab woman in any and all of her relationships. Although this theme is intertwined with others which we will discuss later, it is clear that from

the beginning, this issue dominated the course of her work and set her apart from other female authors of the genre. On this point, Ghālī Shukrī differed from other literary critics who, when 'Aynāk Qadarī first appeared, saw it merely as another reproduction of works by Colette Khūrī and Laylā Ba'albakī. Shukrī and others, however, believed that al-Sammān constituted an innovating force in Arabic literature, as she laid bare the sociological roots of the modern Arab woman's struggle to establish a two-way relationship with the Arab man. Shukrī himself regarded 'Aynāk Qadarī as the starting point of a revolutionary literary career in which al-Sammān was to discover the marvels of the short story, and begin to remove the first of many veils from the ugly face of Arab society. On this aspect, the collection is closely linked with her other major works of this period, Lā Bahr fī Bayrūt and Layl al-Ghurabā', but overall, Shukrī asserts that:

.... [the main point in her writings] is the relationship between men and women in a backward society, This takes shape in the theme of love hanging on the cross of repression and deprivation. The creed and value system of this society are based on the sacred bond between man and woman, husband and wife, parents and children, and between the individual and society.¹

The author, then, focuses particularly on the relation-

ship between man and woman as such. This relationship is described as especially frustrating for the female partner, as her needs for a spiritual partnership based on respect and equality are not satisfied. This situation makes her a silent and lonely outsider, a mere disinterested observer of the male's irresponsible juvenile games.

In her story "al-Qiṭṭah" (The Cat), al-Sammān exposes us to the internal psychological complexities of the mind of the Arab woman in her observation of the relationship between herself and the ravenous young man:

She watches with pleasure their juvenile torment . . . the nakedness of their despicable hunger . . . Challenge, treachery, arrogance, and falsehood rankled in her breast. Nādir [the man she loved] was like a cloud without rain.²

Although opposed to her suitor's "despicable hunger", it is to be noted that this need is strikingly similar to her own unquenchable thirst for tenderness and understanding. This image of thirst and water occurs repeatedly in her writing to give emphasis to her utter emotional isolation:

Who says that she is thirsty? Only a quarter is needed to be put into the slot of a vending machine
Only a quarter is needed to buy a lover.³

In the above quotation, another idea is generated by and

connected with this idea of want, namely, that of reckless sexual promiscuity. Al-Sammān further develops this image in her depiction of mechanical sex as the only mode of communication left in a game-oriented world. The female in this and other stories of the collection is thus thrown into occasional relationships, not in compliance with the heartless male world around her, but rather in a desperate search for tenderness and acceptance on her terms.

Men in al-Sammān's stories are very often described in terms of falsehood and cruel indifference. In such a situation, a woman is brought to the brink of madness.

Here I am, all you jesting people. Can you not hear my muted cries? I am here in a dark corner. I see you. I feel your presence. I suffer with wild madness. I am here. Can you not hear me? I am a woman, have you no feelings?⁴

At one moment, the woman is in despair and assumes an imploring tone. The next moment, she is filled with barely controlled rage over her lot in life, as noted in a previously quoted passage, "Challenge, treachery, arrogance, and falsehood rankle in her breast." Out of utter despair, she creates the ideal man in her imagination--a side-effect of her madness. Yet, when it becomes real, the beautiful dream is shattered to pieces and the gallant knight becomes a merchant bargaining over the possession

of a female body.

Yet, our fantasies continue to burn incense for any man who happens to come along from the mystery of mysteries to the closest secret, which moves us with ecstasy when a man is passing by in the narrow lane below. Thus did I love Ahmad since my secondary school studies were terminated with a slap and spit in my face. Since that time, that narrow lane has become my world and my temple. Its sacred soil is trampled by the feet of one who is neither my father nor my brother. This man is to come and smash in my door and drag me to his mysterious temple. Thus did I love Ahmad whom I fancied to be a mythical knight, and myself riding behind him on his magic horse and embracing his waist with my arms. I fled with him to one of the magic "1001 nights" to the unknown which I love and fear. . . .

Then my mother suddenly opens the door shouting at me: "Haven't you prepared yourself yet? Ahmad, the bridegroom, wishes to see you before we agree on the bridal dowry." I walked behind her like a dumb dog. My mother has forgotten how my father once bought her so that she might suffer child-bearing like any incubator. As for me, I have to keep silent and go on.⁵

Evident here again is al-Sammān's use of the machine imagery, similar to her depiction of the love game as a "vending machine" noted earlier. It is the machinery of society, a male-oriented society, and the seemingly

mechanical motions of love-making and entering into marriage which appall the heroine so much, and frighten her to death. This machine metaphor appears again when she despairingly asks if there is any man capable of loving a woman simply on a tender human basis:

I want to know if there is one man in our town who has not become a machine practising love and friendship in the same way melted iron is burned into dumb moulds. . . . I want to know if there is a human being capable of sharing with another human the same feelings in this vast and yet small world.⁶

Another instance where she escapes the "madness" of reality in the ideal world of her dreams can be seen in the following passage: "I accept the fact that he is dead. He is my highest ideal, but like all ideals, he cannot live and breathe at the same time in this cruel world of reality."⁷

For now, the man of her dreams is far away, in fact, non-existent. As she recognizes this, she turns utter despair inward to herself--a woman--and outwards to the society which makes her feel so deeply the vulnerability and handicap of her sex.

I have committed a foul crime. The mere fact that I am a woman has been my unforgivable shame. The chest from which my breasts protrude is the source

of betrayal to my father's friendship.⁸

The attraction of the female for the male is indeed seen as a betrayal since the woman has not chosen these "charms" for herself but was, nonetheless, born equipped with them. In the same bitter way, she likens her mother to an incubator. Woman, then, is condemned to be crippled by her handicap forever:

I am a weak woman, trying to hide my ugly face. I am still looking for a man who does not care about my ugliness, who feels that I am human, that I feel and suffer. I am going to be crippled inside.⁹

In "Fazzā' Tuyūr Ākhar" (Another Scarecrow), we witness another effect that male domination has on the self-perception of the Arab woman. In this story, she sees herself as non-productive and uncreative because she cannot have a child. Not only does this situation create tensions between herself and her husband, but it also causes her to be vindictive and jealous towards members of her own sex. Just as she destroys the cat who had kittens by throwing them out the window, so too is she determined to destroy her servant who is about to deliver the child:

I realized with pain that I was doing all this because my husband would not talk to me and because my life had become an empty desert frightening me

with its deathly silence.¹⁰

She refuses to call the doctor for her servant who is in labour, but instead, begins to paint and "create" her own child.

Why, why should the doctor come for her sake and not for me? And why should the child be hers and not mine? ... I feel the need to have a child. Let my servant give birth alone. It is not my business. I am also able to give birth through my drawings. I will give birth to a new child.¹¹

Al-Sammān further illustrates here that the Arab woman's perspective of herself and members of her own sex is, again, determined by the Arab man. She gives yet another example of a heroine who does not face her problems but rather prefers to escape.

Al-Sammān presents her readers with a very colourful, intense, and graphic representation of a scorned married woman in "Af'ā Jariḥ" (Wounded Serpent). In this story, the husband and wife are shown at a party, the husband dancing with and being charming to other women in the room. The wife's thoughts are revealed to us as she describes herself as the quiet, cold wife--a dumb failure of a woman. She describes the woman dancing with her husband as a serpent, but then recognizes the fire of the serpent in her own heart as well: "I am crying, shouting,

lost. Nobody hears me. My voice disappears before I can even talk--but I am still a woman.¹² She feels she has been cheated by the man, her husband and her oppressor. When she did not succumb to him immediately before their marriage, he wanted to become engaged; when the mystery of her quietness was known, however, he became disinterested. The author continues with this portrayal of the cheated woman in terms of animal imagery by describing the tigress rising inside her, and thus representing her rage and hatred of not only her husband but also the position of inferiority in which she finds herself. Notice that al-Sammān has her heroine succumb again to the very oppressive societal pressures which she is rebelling against. She portrays the other woman as a "serpent"--just as men do--, and states that the "serpent" in her is happy because other men find her beautiful, making her husband jealous. This pettiness and this concern with physical beauty are representative of man's stereotype of a woman's perspective and yet she plays right into the mould.

It is not only rage which causes her to behave and think illogically, however. It is clear that al-Sammān is showing us that the entire social structure with its traditional morals and taboos does not allow the woman to

behave rationally. The couple did not marry on the basis of companionship or equality, so it is unfair to expect this woman to see herself as anything more than a "wounded serpent". Their relationship is based on sex and thus she sees the resolution of her vengeance in these terms as well--she dances with other men to make her husband jealous, to get him excited, saying: "You see me as a meal, and want my body to eat." Her ultimate retaliation is not to sleep with him after the party, or on any other night. On this point, she feels the serpent inside her is finally sleeping, but the tigress is very much awake. This, the author tells us, is likely the only recourse a "dumb" wife has towards an unfaithful husband in Middle Eastern society. Similar "serpent" imagery in the depiction of woman appears in "Barārī Shaqā'iq al-Nu'mān" (Lands of Red Anemones) which also describes the same kind of psychological struggle in women.

The following quotation epitomizes al-Sammān's theme of the Arab woman's dependence on and submission to the Arab man. She is a victim of her society and its ancient traditions. Notice here also that the author concentrates only on physical characteristics, on the beauty and pleasure of the body. Nowhere does she mention woman's intelligence or personality. Everything is seen in

physical terms in relation to her man:

My eyes cry out to him saying: "Raise the price! Do you not see my slender waist? Raise the price! Do you not see my invisible perfumes and my chains of night (hair)? Raise the price! I am a humble woman who would not revolt even if I know that you will betray me. And when you become sick, I will cry, not in fear for your health, but rather for fear that my children and I might die from hunger. I will weep silently if you return one night with cheap lipstick soiling your shirt. I am supposed to be naive, gentle, and obedient, although my intelligence will stop me from helping you to take off your shoes. . . . and my relationship to you also stops at the edge of your bed, when you leave me and go out into your world of men."¹³

What is striking in all of the above points in relation to the woman's position in Arab society is her utter helplessness within that society and the roles it forces her to play in all of her relationships. Economically and emotionally dependent, woman in this traditional society becomes like chattels, to be bought and sold at the time of marriage with the appropriate downpayment. Al-Samman portrays some grotesque scenes in her stories, forcing the reader to understand or at least be sympathetic to the plight of the Arab woman in modern society. Her descriptions of the wife, lover, daughter, or mother.

who is filled with madness, anger, hate, revenge, and insensitivity are not easily erased visions. However, it is to be noted that the author does not allow any of the heroines to try and formulate a practical way out of these relationships which she feels are so oppressive. Nowhere does she consider the tenderness of the family or her relationships with other women friends as consoling or supportive. Her idea of a relationship between a man and a woman is limited to the situation of the lover and the beloved, excluding all other non-erotic forms of tenderness. This obsession with men as the basis of a woman's identity is the key to al-Sammān's criticism of her society and her sex during this period of her literary career.

Interwoven with her main theme of this inferior, desperate position of women in Arab society is, of course, love. Al-Sammān has already made it clear that love without tenderness and acknowledgement of the equality of lovers and the identity of the female is merely a "vending machine" caricature of love. A good illustration of this is given in "al-Ṭiflah Maḥrūqat al-Khaddayn" (A Baby Girl with Burnt Cheeks), in which the heroine says to her lover:

"Ziyād, I have become weary of the morass of fantasies in which I drown my soul. I have become weary of pretending to believe in your words . . . I give you myself for words which I need to hear. I need the

thought that I have a man with me who loves me and who will share this emptiness and loneliness with me. I used to drink deep from this source but without quenching my thirst. My tongue is dry and sore like wild cactus. I used to drink from false lips. I knew that they were false, yet I could not stop because I am a tired lost woman.¹⁴

Love, then, becomes like water--a matter of life and death. In this desperate sense, the purity of the water is inconsequential to the starving, parched wretch of a woman which the author depicts. Still, however, one continues to wish for and dream of the pure water. Further on this point, al-Sammān illustrates that because of the lack of depth and intensity of love in the heroine's relationship, the emotion can be quickly switched "on and off" and even be re-directed, as in the story entitled "Law" (If):

Why did you not tell me that you were not in love with me any more after we had been living together for two months in Paris? You surprised me by marrying that blond girl. If you had told me, I would have stopped loving you and become a friend.¹⁵

From the above, it is clear that the man does not love either woman, but only himself. As a result of his selfishness and because he does not know the real meaning of love, he will remain alone and lost.

Al-Sammān has her heroine of the story "Khayṭ al-Ḥaṣā al-Ḥumr" (The Thread of Red Pebbles) use love as the only source of stability and identity in her life, and by so doing reduces ideology to a mere emotional commitment. Although the theme of the story expresses the suffering of the Palestinians in general and describes the children in the refugee camps in particular, the basic thrust of the story is representative of the emotional literature of the period. It is clear that at this stage, al-Sammān does not have a real ideological sense of or commitment to the Palestinian cause, and thus concentrates on the results of failure in human terms only: "As for the tents and their lost inhabitants, the feast day hates them . . . and does not stop by their door."¹⁶ She continues to romanticize her theme in this story by having the heroine gaze out the window of her room, staring sentimentally across the palm trees at the Israeli flag in the distance:

I can see the strange flag from my window. They go about their daily life peacefully, but for us lies the lead barrier. Perhaps there is a thin thread of blood on the earth between the threshold of our home and the barrier.¹⁷

And further on the point, al-Sammān's heroine sees love as the answer to her own problems and those of the Palestinians:

We are all refugees. Love alone is the substitute. It alone can imprint on our homes the quality of fatherland. Do you not understand that love alone can provide the canopies of happiness for our dis-integrated generation?¹⁸

Similar to the author's conception of the confused and lost Arab woman who believes that a man's love will solve her problems of loneliness and identity, the heroine depicted in "Khayṭ al-Ḥaşā al-Ḥumr" thinks that the Palestinian problem can be solved in the same manner. In "Aynāk Qadarī" the heroine is similarly shown to have a weak ideological base; she does not really have a commitment to the political cause as such, but joins the organization because of her lover, and leaves it for the same reason. This dichotomy is illustrated in the following passage:

Your cause . . . was a failure from the beginning. You used to fight against the sun wishing that it would rise in the west, that it should silence the waves of the sea, and that night should lose its way to the streets of the city . . . You have succeeded in defeating your cause. But it was doomed from the beginning as a failure. Your victory was a greater failure. You yourself are a great failure, tomboyish female.¹⁹

Al-Sammān writes that to be deprived of love is

to be deprived of life. That is why, in her distress, the heroine ponders a great deal about death. In her story "Mā warā' al-Ḥubb" (Beyond Love), the author declares that one can never overcome death as long as one fears it. She further states that every human being is born alone, crucified alone. No doubt there is influence here from the French existentialists with whom the author was obviously well-acquainted. This is evident in her reference to these philosophers in "Umsiyah Ukhrā Bāridah" (Another Cold Night) when she says: "Ask your bookshelf [about] Sartre, Kafkā, Camus, and Eliot."²⁰

Al-Sammān tries to describe death, using strange metaphors which are rarely used in its depiction. It seems that her heroines actually fool themselves into accepting an attractive version of death; this belief allows them to live recklessly with drugs and sex, since death, seen as the destruction of life, is not something to fear. On this existential base, the heroine of "'Aynāk Qadarī" never really challenges her fate or tries to find solutions to her problems of loneliness and feelings of loss. The title is therefore very well chosen as it shows the readiness to suffer as opposed to fighting against the roots of suffering. In "Law", the heroine again escapes from her problems, but this time to her

books. She said: "I am going back to 'Paradise Lost' and will forget about your eyes and your leaving in the darkness of winter and clouds. I will leave the planes and go back to my library."²¹

Further examples of the author's death theme may be seen in Lā Baḥr fī Bayrūt in which the heroine asks: "What is death? Is it a beautiful woman with flowing hair made of apples and blood?"²² And further:

I shall see the place where they will bury me when I die . . . it is the graveyard. He hates the graveyard. He tries in vain to convince himself that death is an ordinary thing, simply moving from a luxurious home into a poor one.²³

The wind carries me far away. I am a cloud. I am a breath. I am a grain of sand in a vast desert, in a gray desert. There is nothing but a mocking wind, making words inscribed on rocks, the words of an arrogant man.²⁴

Real death is for me to know others. Oh, how afraid I am of what is still to come.²⁵

In "al-Hāwiyah" (The Chasm) the character sees everything as folly--love, death, eternity are all the same to her. "Nothing remains except our weakness. There is nothing . . . except darkness and false hearts."²⁶ From this fatalistic perspective, she realizes that although she is always looking for love, it cannot last

throughout eternity.

The breakdown of social traditions and the resultant increase in sexual promiscuity can be seen as responsible for the isolation, estrangement, and the loneliness which dominate the collection of short stories entitled Lā Baḥr fī Bayrūt. Like some works of Ba'ālbakī and Khūrī, this sample of al-Sammān's work presents us with a dark, confused series of events in the lives of heroines, reflecting the confusion and restlessness in her mind. This is the orientation of "Nidā' al-Safīnah" (The Call of the Ship) which begins with an aimless journey by the heroine and a married man in a speedy car. We see this existentialist theme of estrangement once again in other stories also, such as: "Bayn Anyāb Rajul Wāḥid" (Between the Teeth of One Man), "al-Rajul dhū al-Hātifayn" (The Man with Two Telephones), and "La'nat al-Laḥm al-Aṣmar." Still deeper psychological isolation and confusion is portrayed in the story "Ghajariyah bilā Marfa'". Here we see that al-Sammān mixes her romantic and sexual images with the aggression and frustration of her feelings of being lost. This mélange of pleasure, destruction, and loneliness in the emotions of the heroine is presented so quickly that one is left confused and the conflict presented in the story unresolved. The fol-

lowing passages illustrate this mixture of tensions and emotions:

Once upon a time when the night was a verdant myth flowing out of your eyes, filling the sea before us, you stretched out your arms to me, with a thousand tales of loneliness in your hand. I did not hesitate; my hand embraced the story of loneliness in your hand, and for the first time, I experienced the joy of clouds roaring with thunder when struck by the lightning and the shiver of meeting.²⁷

I saw you walking, you, your wife, and your children, and I walked behind you like a she-wolf, determined to devour the shepherd of the flock. I simply wished to tear your wife to pieces. I wanted to devour her. I did not hide from myself the mask of artificial tenderness which I wore, but one of your daughters stumbled and fell to the ground. You tenderly lifted her up. I cried, I cried on the street! I cried because often did I fall but no one was there to lift me up. My father was not there to lift me up, because he had run away with a lost woman like me. I accepted to leave you alone only because I did not want your daughter to grow up and become like me, a "gypsy without a port of call."²⁸

The most significant representation of al-Sammān's feelings of isolation and loneliness can be seen at the end of this story in which the "gypsy" heroine walks off with the blind man.

I am a gypsy, lost in the myths of the city of brass, lamenting her lost port, lamenting roads which we are forced to tread alone, with strangers with whom we pass the journey of life and pretend the bliss and joy of meeting. There is a man appearing from far away, walking slowly. He comes towards me; my friend is a blind man, tapping the ground with his cane. He walks unknown roads. There is no difference for him between dawn and sunset. I feel a strong bond between us. Thus I walk beside him, with him, hearing the sound of my footsteps.²⁹

Here we not only witness the influence of Western existentialism on the author's thoughts, but also her need to have a man share her sense of being lost, or blind. On this symbolism, Farrāj feels that the blind man is the embodiment of these feelings of loss as presented by al-Sammān, and that his cane is a somewhat confused guide amidst this world of darkened loneliness.³⁰ This interesting image can also be seen in terms of the heroine's choice in life; here she chooses the blindness, the unreality, the lost world over the real world and sight. Like her character in other stories, al-Sammān's "gypsy" has a desperate need for a man to accompany her in the lost world, giving her a sense of security and identity in her estranged existence in this world.

The breakdown of social traditions which, as noted above, was partially responsible for the freer and yet

confused expression of sexuality in Middle Eastern society can also be seen as giving impetus to increased class consciousness in the Arab society. "Al-Uṣba' al-Sādisah" (The Sixth Finger) portrays this increased awareness of class distinctions in terms of a love story between a rich girl and a poor man, one which Farrāj sees as a "...concrete symbol of revolt against established social norms. It is the clean and challenging finger of the poor educated man."³¹ In the story, the heroine is raised in the palace and falls in love with Khālīd, the poor, yet pure, educated man. The turning point in the story occurs when she gives Khālīd a pair of diamond cufflinks for his birthday, and he does not even have a formal dress shirt with which to wear them. Upon receipt of this present, Khālīd sees the wide gap separating them, and sends her away. She subsequently goes to London and returns after many years, but still has the love of Khālīd, her "sixth finger", in her heart. When she sees him after this long period, however, bowing before her in his elegant dress shirt and cufflinks, she realizes this is not the "sixth finger" of her memories. She exclaims: "Don't you understand that I loved you as a marvelous sixth finger? I loved you as a real thing, daring, shaping the city with your teachings and boldness; but now you have lowered

yourself in the temple of hypocrisy and cut off your finger."³²

Although Farrāj in his analysis of this work seems satisfied with al-Sammān's use of a finger in her depiction of a real and pure man challenging his destiny in a unique fashion, I do not see this as a successful metaphor. The very concept is almost grotesque, and at the very least, abnormal.— If one is attempting to put forward an image of perfection and beauty—that is, the ideal, uncompromising man—why not choose the "first" finger? In this manner, the amputation of the finger would make a more complete picture, that is, with only four fingers, the character becomes impotent. In al-Sammān's depiction, however, the loss of the sixth finger merely means that he becomes "normal".

The heroine of "al-Uṣba' al-Sādisah", a bourgeois girl, like the other females of al-Sammān's collection, views her problems from a romantic perspective. A similar overriding characteristic of the heroine is also her inability to face or solve her problems. Instead of remaining with her "sixth finger" in marriage or an affair, she turns away and enters her lost world of fantasy and unhappiness. Although she is evidently against the barriers of class which separate them, she is afraid to act

according to her convictions. In this manner, the author portrays the frustration of the modern woman in Middle Eastern society, who, although awakened to her rights and freedom of choice, is stifled by lingering tradition and custom in her personal life.

As noted above, this expression of feelings of loss, of isolation, recur regularly throughout al-Sammān's stories. In "al-Rajul dhū al-Hātifayn" she begins with the words: "I am like a fired bullet, aimlessly roaming the streets of Beirut which is like a doughy mixture of clamor and carelessness. I look for you, stranger, because I have chosen you to be my executioner."³³ However, in this same story, there does seem to be some recognition of her problem, of the problem of Arab society in general, and that it will serve no purpose to run away from the conflicts and tensions created by a society in transition: "I shall not run away from reality, for I have chosen to see and to know. Beirut is Damascus, Paris, and London. It is ourselves from which there is no escape."³⁴

Cultural differences, the divergent perspectives of life as seen by peoples of the East and the West, are also a prominent theme of al-Sammān's stories during this period. Layl al-Ghurabā' is an illustration of this, as it presents us with a human portrait of life in London as

lived by an Eastern man whose heart is still in the desert. The heroine's love for Hāzim is that patch of light which glimmers over the dark space of London. As an example of integrity, purity, and faith in humanity, Hāzim then becomes both the man and the problem--he is the specific as well as the general man. He is the entire world for a woman who perceives stability and certainty only in terms of instinct and sexuality. She feels that this must remain the dominant factor in her relationships because true rationality is instinctive and not fettered; it is the mind which has not yet reached full maturity to be able to begin its independent search for the true colour and smell of things as they are. Thus, when Hāzim is imprisoned and loses his faith, she also loses her faith in their mutually accepted principles, which means the severance of all relations with society, belief, and country:

He loves me! You Eastern women still cling tenaciously to these concepts which our modern age has left behind. Love, what is it? I do not have outside my room a balcony on which to stand at night like Juliet. I work eight hours a day and have to put up with the kisses of my boss and the smell of his false teeth in order to earn ten pound sterling per week.³⁵

I am, however, incapable of enjoying passing friendships on trains. I cannot be friendly with a man I do not know. I cannot offer distilled sex, isolated

from my own inner feelings. Anyhow, I shall try.
I will come back to you another time.³⁶

Even the names the author has chosen for her characters give us an insight into their cultural integrity. Ḥāzim, for example, is a common popular Middle Eastern name meaning "resolute" or "decisive". Mado, on the other hand, is neither an Eastern nor Western name, but merely a convenient "nickname" which represents the cultural confusion of the character herself. Her erotic imagery describing her emotions with her lover emphasizes her perspective that an "Eastern" love affair is softer, more exciting than one with a Western man, yet at the same time there is the implication of submission and surrender in that relationship.

When you kiss me I refuse to believe that you use the same mouth for love and eating. I feel like a luminous cloud, submitting to your electrical charges. I hold on to you, and surrender myself with the last breath of death. I submit to moments which only your lips can offer.³⁷

I get up and the mewling rises to a wild crescendo. I shake in the heritage of an oriental woman who has lived long centuries in the ḥarīm, a woman who learns how to arouse a man with her movements.³⁸

In this story, then, we live in a world of feelings and thoughts which know no repose. We encounter Palestine and

Damascus as two birds nesting in the heat, fettered with the wild world of London. The cultural contradiction here constitutes the main difference between East and West, but other minor differences also play a role in its crystallization.³⁹ The heroine contrasts the mechanical sexual relationships in the West with the warm, emotional relations of the East through the personality of her lover Ḥāzim as she says: "I wonder at the difference in my relationship with you--with you alone I feel my femininity, with you alone I become a real woman. Now, however, I have absolutely no sexual identity."⁴⁰

Although "Buq'at Daw' 'alā al-Masrah" (The Spotlight on the Stage) does highlight al-Sammān's theme of cultural differences, the real conflict this story treats remains unclear because the heroine herself does not display any spirit or background of the social, political, or historical situation of her environment. The dialogue between Mado and Ḥāzim illustrates that she understands the world only through her relationship to a man and that she lacks a wider relationship with the world around her. In her dependence, she is ready to abandon whatever social and political opinions she may have for the sake of this limited relationship.

[Mado] : I feel as though I own the whole world.
I am happy.

[Ḥāzim]: I feel as though I own only a small part
of the world and that makes me happy.

[Madō] : I own it.

[Ḥāzim]: I belong to it, and in this way, I own it.

[Mado] : I own the world.

[Ḥāzim]: The problem is not what you and I think,
but it is that we lose our true identity
when our city becomes filthy. We die if
our city becomes disfigured or commits
suicide. When we defend our values, we
are in fact defending our children. We
defend our egotism when we redeem it.

[Mado] : I own the world.

[Ḥāzim]: Yes, you do indeed own it.⁴¹

Partly related to this theme of cultural orienta-
tion, and partly related to al-Sammān's overriding concern
with the oppression of the Arab woman in Middle Eastern
society is the "double standard" as exercised by the Arab
man. On this point, al-Sammān makes very clear the contra-
diction which exists between tradition and pleasure, be-
tween societal acceptance and inequality of man and woman,
in stories such as "Yā Dimashq" (Oh! Damascus).

He was one of my students. I knew him very well.
He used to dance with the sisters of his friends

but he never allowed them to dance with his sister. He does not believe in what he does and runs away from realities.⁴²

[Ḥassān]: Sūzān, I love the smell of this perfume. What is it? Is it "Carven"?

[Sūzān]: Yes, you always try to test my taste.

[Ḥassān]: The truth is that I love this perfume because it reminds me of a girl dear to me in Damascus. She used to love music and perfumes. I like this perfume because it recreates moments which we had together.

[Sūzān]: Does her name, character, and personality resemble mine?

[Ḥassān]: Yes, she has your stubbornness, your pride, ambition, and strong personality. In short, all the qualities I love in you.

[Sūzān]: Will you marry her when you go back?

[Ḥassān]: No.

[Sūzān]: Why?

[Ḥassān]: Because she possesses these qualities.

[Sūzān]: You contradictory Eastern man!⁴³

Here the character of Ḥassān highlights this East-West cultural difference. His relationships with Western women represented by Sūzān is contrasted with his relationships with Eastern women represented by Sawsan, the woman he loved in Damascus. He sees Sawsan as a representation of purity and faithfulness and feels that even thinking

of her (sexually) would spoil her. Dreaming of her as he flies over Damascus, he contrasts Sawsan with Western women and states that his Eastern girlfriend is indeed like a Far-eastern woman who would burn herself with her husband.⁴⁴

This is in direct contrast with the looser, more promiscuous Western woman who carelessly makes love while her child and paralyzed husband are still present. Interestingly enough, however, al-Sammān portrays the Arab hero in this story as being just as "lost" as her heroines; he, too, runs away from reality without making any real decisions.

In the same story, al-Sammān portrays a different aspect of this cultural difference, presenting her characters in terms of their lost traditions, lost culture--and perhaps lost souls--since they have moved to the West. For example:

I switch on the lamp on my night table. This is my father's letter which I have not yet answered. He writes: "Ramaḍān has come home. Do not break your fast, my son. Tell your neighbours to wake you up for the pre-dawn subūr meal and let them take a meal with you." Why can't I make him understand what I have to face? Why can't I tell him that my neighbour is now with her lover, and that millions of neighbours do not know what Ramaḍān is?⁴⁵

In the story entitled "al-Muwā'" (The ~~Meowing~~ ^{Meowing}) al-Sammān contrasts the Western view of the East with an

Eastern view of the West on the basis of sexual equality. Similar to the denunciation by the women's liberation movement of any woman who remains at home and does not work, this passage indicates that al-Sammān, even at this early stage, had a deep understanding of the tensions between these two groups of women: "You women of the East do not know the meaning of real life: hunger, desire, jealousy, fulfillment. The only thing that your man requires is that you know how to cook..."⁴⁶ Yet, at the same time, she is also critical of the West and the way Western men treat their women and even the way they look: "This new generation in London makes me feel estranged. I cannot [bear to see] long-haired men with effeminate looks. In my country, men are still the masters... they treat women in a way that makes them understand that they are still men..."⁴⁷

Al-Sammān's pre-1967 period can be seen as a progression in terms of her heroines and their ability not only to perceive their situation in Middle Eastern society, but also to be able to shape their own destiny. In this sense, 'Aynāk Qadarī is a caricature of the title: the Arab woman can do no more than follow her man and depend upon him for her identity. It is a position which the characters of this collection seem unable to escape

from, even to complain about openly. Any moment out of the "status quo" results in feelings of being lost and unloved. Lā Baḥr' fī Bayrūt, however, is a collection which sees some small progression towards improvement; al-Sammān allows the heroines of these stories to become aware of the political situation and to have some understanding of the larger world. Woman here is not lost as in the first collection, but she is still hesitant to act on her own, and feels secure in the context of her relationship with a man. The third collection, Layl al-Ghura-bā', departs from the original path somewhat in that al-Sammān's existentialist influence dominates the stories and the lives of the heroines. In this context, the woman is now clearly ready to experience anything and everything, resulting in indulgence in drugs, indiscriminate sex as well as feelings of isolation and loneliness. Here she begins to display some understanding or at least awareness of the Palestinian cause and begins to describe the life of the "foreigners" of the West in relation to her own estrangement from traditional Middle Eastern life. It is clear, however, that at this early stage in her writings, al-Sammān's understanding of the Palestinian question is still very limited. She is, in a sense, still "lost".

Just as her first book had a tremendously accurate title, 'Aynāk Qadarī' which summarized the dependent status of the Arab woman in relation to her man, al-Sammān makes a point of choosing meaningful titles. For example, "Af'ā Jarīḥ", a story of the disintegration of woman as a wife, can be interpreted as a cynical reference to the snake in the story of Adam and Eve. In this story she cries out, "I am a woman, don't you hear me?" for we may assume that the snake, depicted as a temptress to the pure soul of man, is now "wounded" and cannot be heard. Similarly, the title of the story "al-Ṭiflah Maḥ-rūqat al-Khaddayn" can be seen as significant in terms of the "darkness" looking for the "light"--and in the process, the heroine is burned. Also, the red colour in "Khayṭ al-Ḥasā al-Ḥumr" perhaps is a signal of the psychological crisis which the heroine of the story undergoes. In the story "Muwā'" another possible inference can be drawn from the title in terms of the pregnant mother cat and the pregnant servant. The crying, or meowing of the cat, is perhaps similar to the silent wailing of the heroine against society, against her fate which allows woman, like her servant, to become slaves of their biological functions, and of man.

When reading al-Sammān's works of this period, we

must remember that she began her literary career at a very young age. In fact, her first collection was published when she was twenty years of age. Also, many of her stories are based on her own personal experience while living in various Middle Eastern countries and in Europe. With these two factors in mind, the anger, frustration, and wild images expressed in some of the stories are more easily understood. It is clear that much of her rebelliousness was the result of a youthful perspective in terms of her confrontation with traditional mores and values in relation to love and sex. Despite her age, even in the stories of 'Aynāk Qadarī, al-Sammān does give us many interesting insights and is capable of examining emotions and the psychological complexities of women in many different situations. It is to be noted, however, that not all of her stories during this period had a significant meaning or revealed some deep insight. "Al-Fajr 'ind al-Nāfidhah" (Dawn on the Window) for example, is a story about the sacrifice of a woman for her children, but it is unfortunately without real substance or depth. Similarly, "Fī Sinn Wālidī", (As Old as My Father), "Wa Yabkī al-Raḡm 216" (No. 216 Crying), "al-Rajul dhū al-Hātifayn", and "Hiwāyah Mut'ibah" (A Tiring Hobby) have nothing really significant or revealing to tell us, and seem to be written in a state of unreflective restlessness. This fact does not

diminish her overall stature as an author with a revolutionary impact on modern Arabic literature. Al-Sammān proved in her first collection that she was, unlike many of her contemporaries, a writer who dealt with human problems within the context of the changing social structure of Arab society, and was not merely a proponent of "women's literature".

From the story entitled "al-Hāwiyah" (The Chasm), the following passage can be seen as representative of much of al-Sammān's techniques and themes:

I must crawl into the little cracks in the walls.
I must hide my ugly face every time darkness destroys the light of a passing car. I am a weak woman, still possessed by a desire for a man who is not frightened of my ugliness, a man who sees me as a human being capable of suffering and dreaming. I am close to exploding and being torn to pieces. The ferocious worms of tragedy will lick my bleeding wounds hungrily.⁴⁸

Here we are presented with the central character of her literary production of this period--the lost woman. Trying to escape from the traditional view and status of the woman in Arab society, the author presents us with an estranged character being torn apart by her own emotions. She indeed cares about beauty, her physical appearance, and the attractions of men, but at the same time she wants

to be known as a human being, just like man--"capable of suffering and dreaming." In this context, al-Sammān concentrates on the deep psychological complexities created in the woman and within the society by the contradictions and "double standard" of the male members of that society. The female characters in her collections invariably see themselves, as above, as "weak women" who need a man to complete their identity or, indeed, to make their life worth living. This theme of dependence, of being lost, paints a black picture of hopelessness for the heroines, particularly in her first two collections. The skillful use of metaphor and imagery in her attempt to describe the heroines in their anger and frustration have earned al-Sammān her status as a revolutionary in Arabic literature. There are numerous examples of this symbolism, particularly of animals and machinery, in her works, a few of which we have earlier observed. As in the above-noted passage which conjures up an image of giant worms squirming and eating her bloody wounds, these grotesque descriptions and metaphors themselves are a part of the depth and intensity of the emotions in her characters which her stories try to explore.

NOTES

- ¹Gh. Shukrī, Ghādah al-Sammān, pp. 13-4.
- ²Gh. al-Sammān, 'Aynāk Qadarī', p. 49.
- ³Ibid., p. 54.
- ⁴Ibid., pp. 57-8.
- ⁵Ibid., pp. 96-7.
- ⁶Ibid., p. 77.
- ⁷Ibid., p. 82.
- ⁸Ibid., p. 91.
- ⁹Ibid., p. 140.
- ¹⁰Idem, Layl al-Ghurabā', p. 13.
- ¹¹Ibid., pp. 17-8.
- ¹²Idem, 'Aynāk Qadarī', p. 59.
- ¹³Ibid., p. 98.
- ¹⁴Ibid., p. 76.
- ¹⁵Ibid., p. 146.
- ¹⁶Idem, Layl al-Ghurabā', p. 162.
- ¹⁷Ibid., p. 169.
- ¹⁸Ibid., p. 154.

- ¹⁹Idem, 'Aynāk Qadarī', pp. 8, 14.
- ²⁰Idem, 'Layl al-Ghurabā', p. 146.
- ²¹Idem, 'Aynāk Qadarī', p. 149.
- ²²Idem, 'Lā Baḥr fī Bayrūt', p. 56.
- ²³Ibid., p. 44.
- ²⁴Ibid., p. 59.
- ²⁵Ibid., p. 61.
- ²⁶Idem, 'Aynāk Qadarī', p. 138.
- ²⁷Idem, 'Lā Baḥr fī Bayrūt', p. 75.
- ²⁸Ibid., pp. 77-8.
- ²⁹Ibid., p. 81.
- ³⁰A. Farrāj, 'al-Ḥurriyah', p. 76.
- ³¹Ibid., p. 84.
- ³²Gh. al-Sammān, 'Lā Baḥr fī Bayrūt', p. 103.
- ³³Ibid., pp. 108, 110.
- ³⁴Ibid., p. 139.
- ³⁵Idem, 'Layl al-Ghurabā', p. 31.
- ³⁶Ibid., p. 34.
- ³⁷Ibid., p. 36.

- ³⁸Ibid., p. 37.
- ³⁹A. Farrāj, al-Ḥurriyah, p. 69.
- ⁴⁰Gh. al-Sammān, Layl al-Ghurabā', p. 38.
- ⁴¹Ibid., pp. 49-50.
- ⁴²Idem, Lā Baḥr fī Bayrūt, p. 146.
- ⁴³Idem, Layl al-Ghurabā', p. 114.
- ⁴⁴Ibid., pp. 128-9.
- ⁴⁵Ibid., p. 115.
- ⁴⁶Ibid., p. 32.
- ⁴⁷Ibid., p. 35.
- ⁴⁸Idem, ‘Aynāk Qadarī, p. 140.

CHAPTER IV

POST-1967 WORKS: RAḤĪL AL-MARĀFI' AL-QADĪMAH

Ghādah al-Sammān's post - 1967 works deal with two issues which have affected the entire Arab world: the Arab defeat of 1967 and the Lebanese Civil War. These two main areas of concern serve as a background for her other themes of love, oppression of women, corruption, and class discrimination. As we have noted in the previous chapter, al-Sammān's works reflect her maturation as a person and as a writer and her post-1967 works continue this trend. Raḥīl al-Marāfi' al-Qadīmah is critical of the Arabs for their failure to admit the defeat and berates them through characterization and plot development. The female characters in this collection seem to be more aware politically, as well as committed, and this is contrasted with the insincerity and unconcern of the Arab men who continue to oppress women, and ultimately, the entire society. Bayrut 75 represents an even greater development in al-Sammān as a writer and social critic of the Arab world. In this later work, she continues to berate Arab society for its fear, tenacity to traditions, and for its oppression of women but in a more analytical fashion. Delving more into the historical reasons for the current problems

in Arab society, al-Sammān attempts to understand her characters and, in doing so, makes them more believable and realistic. Her style in the first novel of this period as well as the second illustrates her mastery of literary techniques such as the use of symbolism, setting, and characterization. In general, one can say that al-Sammān's post-1967 period represents a growth in her understanding and perception of the problems in Arab society in general and Lebanese society in particular.

Ghādah al-Sammān focuses on the defeat of 1967, its causes and effects on Arab society. In the first story of Raḥīl al-Marāfi', "al-Dānūb al-Ramādī" (The Gray Danube), al-Sammān discusses the effect of the Arab military defeat of June 1967 by introducing a lost and disillusioned heroine who escapes reality by over-indulgence in drugs, sex, and dreams. The story begins: "Another day. Another hotel. Another city, and I am on the new L.S.D. trip."¹ Although the heroine is able to speak six different languages, she discovers that she knows absolutely nothing about the people who speak these languages. It is in this setting that she decides that languages are hopeless and useless to her, and not real tools of communication. She thus escapes into an utterly speechless world, refusing to use her own language, and hoping to find true humanity

and true humanitarianism in her silence. Moreover, in her silent world of extremism, the heroine does not differentiate between language and truth; the two in her estimation are synonymous:

But Georgi was not a man like any other. He was known for his essential maleness which was an unforgotten truth; he surely possessed it because he was mute, that is, he was unable to lie.²

In this work, al-Sammān creates a mute character in order to contrast the truth with the unforgivable lies which were broadcast over the Arab radio stations. We understand that the heroine, at gunpoint, is faced with death for giving false political and military information over the radio. It is an act which she knows will lead to the death of her brother and thousands of other disillusioned, misinformed young men. She, in turn, is contrasted with male characters like Ḥāzīm who, as manager of the radio station, unconcernedly transmits false information and rewards himself by luring the heroine to his bed. Al-Sammān excuses the heroine for her immoral deed when she recounts the act as a result of long sexual repression and subjection:

And I fell on him like a female who had spent two thousand years under the desert sand, and had another two thousand years of waiting in her

blood and genes, then found herself in the arms of a man while the "Blue Danube" played on.³

Similar to the other female characters in her stories, al-Sammān's heroine is sexually repressed--by her society's traditions and morals--and sexually oppressed by the male members of the society who take advantage of the double standard on which sexuality is based in the Arab world. The writer thus presents us with this image of the woman who has spent "centuries" in the desert, deprived of sex, and now her 'thirst' is satisfied by an oppressor. This irony is carried through in the characterization of the story, for even in the demanding position of radio announcer, the heroine is still subjected to discrimination and seen as a sex object with no ability to think or live her life independently. But al-Sammān emphasizes here also that the woman is conditioned to accept this kind of treatment, and does not really confront the problem or attempt to correct the inferior position man has ascribed to her. Helpless and silent, the heroine exists:

He screamed at me: "Your small head has not been made to think but to wait for me in my bed. Go there and wait for me." And I carried my "small head" and left, and he came with his "big" body to begin brainwashing me once more.⁴

Al-Sammān continues her story by critically describing the issues of the Arab defeat, in an almost satirical manner. It is clear from the outset that she is not sympathetic to the shallow and irrational excuses used by the Arabs to justify their defeat. This feeling is personified in the story's heroine who cannot really live with the lies the Arabs fabricate, lies which have led to the death of her brother and to her father's illness. This image of 'death in life' is very graphically presented in the description of the heroine while she broadcasts the false editorial over the airwaves. Not only does she become speechless with the grossness of the lies, but she also sees a vision of her dead brother through the glass partition in the studio. As she speaks, the vision becomes more real:

But the eyes behind the partitioned glass wall became increasingly fixed, angry and on fire. I see my brother's face among them, then the blood pours from the eyes. Blood, blood, blood, and the blood begins to cover my brother's face and the glass, and then seeps into where I am standing. It continues to rise, and covers my feet and my knees, higher and higher up to my chest, my throat, and then the blood suffocates me, and I am unable to utter a word. I only scream, scream, and scream.⁵

Like many female characters in al-Sammān's other stories, the heroine here is torn between her loyalty to her father's desires and her lover's. She remembers that on his death bed, the father asked his daughter to continue writing about the injustices, and not to lose her artistic voice, while her lover advises her to lose herself (to him) in drugs, liquor, and sex, and suggests that her time will be better spent in writing him love poems. Here again al-Sammān underscores the gaps which exist between men and women on the one side and between people and beliefs on the other side. The Arab man is seen in the story as an individual with misplaced priorities and shallow, superfluous beliefs. If anyone is responsible for the defeat in the war, it is him--the Arab man. Al-Sammān sets out to prove this point by using the manager of the radio station to represent every corrupt manager or official in each and every corrupt system in the Arab world. In the middle of it all, the Arab woman is seen as not only the source of all evil, but also the victim of it in any given problem. Again, the sexual discrimination against the woman is a major issue: the Arab man expects the woman to be a virgin on her wedding night while he himself entices her to be his bed partner at any time and any place. As if in explana-

tion of his behaviour, Ḥāzim says: "I am a respectable man who should marry a respectable woman."⁶ To this virtual admission of his double standard of morality, the author has her heroine respond: "My respectable man, you have transformed my voice into a prostitute and have turned the airwaves in my country into brothels, my respectable man."⁷

At last, the heroine finds solace and comfort in nature where she does not have to speak a human language nor listen to a human voice. Although her disillusion does not completely disappear, the heroine does emerge from her experience with a new perspective, and a new understanding of her nation.

Al-Sammān successfully chooses a setting for the dark scenes in this story which have a very effective psychological impact, especially on the Arab reader. She knows very well that religion, sex, and politics are three issues in which the Arab woman must not involve herself, either physically or conversationally. Yet, al-Sammān enters this forbidden world, particularly discrediting this exclusiveness of the Arab male discussion on sexual matters, going as far as using the illegitimate Arab child as a symbol for the Arab defeat of June 1967.

I left the bar with the knowledge of having the devil's son inside my womb. I felt disgraced not because I was pregnant out of wedlock, but because that child would always remind me of the shame of defeat. My son is the son of the devil. I hate him, yet I love him at the same time with the same intensity.⁸

The L.S.D. trip portrayed in the story is seen as endless as the nightmare which hovers over the Arab world through the darkest years of its history. The heroine's dissociation with the past and her determination to return to a world of struggle and resistance highlighted by the death of its youth is very striking. The shocking and tragic events which form the action of the story lead us to somewhat expect it to end as it does, with two important events; first, the abortion of the child and the subsequent psychological release from any traces of the defeat; and second, the return of the heroine to Beirut after she reads the headlines about the death of Fawwāz, the Palestinian.

Bū 'Alī Yāsīn and Nabīl Sulaymān note that al-Sammān ends her story by having the heroine confront her problem directly after Fawwāz' death, and after Georgi (the addict who introduced her to drugs) leaves her. They feel, however, that the force with which the writer

expresses her feelings of vanity and romance loses its impact in her lengthy, drawn-out conclusion, which actually interferes with the optimistic end and decreases its importance.⁹ Ghālī Shukrī, on the other hand, sees that a sacrifice has been performed in the character of Fawwāz, and the past is being destroyed to open the way for "the present and the future."¹⁰ Shukrī also notes that the writer centers the dialogue between herself and the subject. In this sense, al-Sammān does not take either side, but merely participates in establishing the new vision rather than concentrating on the fact of defeat itself. She speaks to this generation with the ever-present revolutionary aspirations despite all the poisonous bourgeois illness of society which pollutes the air. Al-Sammān does not, however, offer any specific suggestions as to the details for the reconstruction of society.

Further on this point, Shukrī states that the feeling of alienation is a subjective state of being for the bourgeoisie, and that sexual revolt is merely a means of protest used by that class.¹¹ He feels that al-Sammān is associating the problem of the heroine and her personality with the reality of the bourgeoisie, and while the heroine tries to dissociate herself from her problems,

they remain unsolved. Sulaymān and Yāsīn see the heroine as a perfect representation of all Arab women who move from one contradiction to another--from worship⁷ ping one man to despising all men, from liberating herself from her lover Ḥāzim to indulging in promiscuous sex.¹² And, in the final analysis, whatever she does appears to be a negative response to an insolvable problem.¹³

Another story of importance in the collection is "Ḥarīq dhālik al-Ṣayf" (That Summer's Fire). This story deals mainly with the effect of the defeat on the Arab intellectuals. It also forecasts the defeat on the eve of the June war. Most of this forecast is seen in terms of the art exhibition al-Bāhī intended to put on the fifth of June 1967. Most of his paintings portrayed the tragedy of defeat and the irony of death in the face of life.

While the radio announcer Mudā loses her voice in "al-Dānūb al-Ramādī" (The Gray Danube), the heroine in "Ḥarīq dhālik al-Ṣayf" (That Summer's Fire) is subjected to a very severe skin burn after her house on the West Bank was demolished in 1965 in the sporadic attacks on that area by the Israeli army. As soon as the burned skin heals leaving traces of scars two years later, the heroine

is subjected to another skin burn during the 1967 war. The heroine at this point is described as losing her faith in life and, like al-Sammān's other female characters, she resorts to escape and isolation rather than face reality. For her, the entire universe becomes a graveyard and the Arab world is the largest graveyard where one million Arabs lie dead together with their different cultural, social and political ideologies. In fact, the heroine meets some of her friends in the cemetery where they turn a gravestone into a platform to discuss the 1967 defeat and other important issues. In this image, it is as if al-Sammān wants the heroine to return to her mother's womb where life is more secure and trouble-free.

Al-Sammān is also critical of Arab attitudes in the aftermath of the Arab defeat. Disapproving of the names the Arabs gave the defeat and of their emotional and irrational reaction, she calls for a realistic and rational stand on the matter, that is, that the Arabs face reality and admit their 1967 defeat. For example:

Another intellectual stood up and began to talk about the virtues of the defeat, and how it is a naksah (a relapse) and not defeat; those who admitted to the defeat were now seen as traitors. (Why is facing the truth considered treason? Can

we ever be victorious if we betray ourselves by evading the truth?)¹³

Al-Sammān is also critical of partisan politics. She views participation in any kind of partisan ideology as a temporary aberration at best. As soon as the heroine joins in it, she becomes disillusioned and moves on to other things. Her criticisms of Arab society unfortunately fall into generalizations, mistaken identities, and percentages, particularly when she claims that all Arabs are "dead", and that illiteracy is as high as 90 % in the Arab world. "The rain of years will not wash the millions of dead bodies scattered over the streets, fields, farms, and caves of this land."¹⁴

We, the people, the defeated, and the murdered, and the innocent, lying inside our bodies in the streets of the capitals of the Arab states, and the streets of the towns and villages.¹⁵

I began to collect information about illiteracy in the Arab world. I was horrified by the census and the high percentage (90 %) of illiteracy. In the evening when I went to party headquarters to write an article for a newspaper, I felt the fire in my yet tender wound, when I realized that all of those to whom I wanted to address myself were incapable of reading my lines.¹⁶

The writer deals with feminism in this story by

speaking of the economy achieved through women's hard labor as the most essential step towards their independence and freedom. Yet, this very important factor in the liberation of Arab women is not discussed deeply or profoundly in the story. Rather, it is seen as a side issue:

I do not have a choice as far as working all day is concerned. I am a poor girl, alone, and I cannot tolerate a lover who spends his money on me, nor can I marry simply to find a provider.¹⁷

It is also to be noted that al-Sammān succeeds in conveying to the reader a sense of time and space, and a sense of involvement in the action of the characters. The setting in the cemetery is the gray, darkish night which characterizes the truth of the defeat and the living-dead Arabs, those whose souls are dead and whose bodies are already deteriorating. Al-Sammān goes on to point out that these living-dead are divided into two groups: the first group understands the reality of the defeat and its members are few. The second group consists of those who spread rumours and create bourgeois illusions about the defeat and their number is great.

There is a basic similarity in the endings of "Ḥarīq dhālik al-Ṣayf" and "al-Dānūb al-Ramādī". In the first, the heroine engages in sexual intercourse with

al-Bāhī, which can be seen as her attempt to preserve life, or rekindle life and hope in a barren and dead land. 'Afīf Farrāj also sees the sexual intercourse inside the coffin as a symbol of the renewal of life.¹⁸ Yāsīn and Sulaymān see the same intercourse as a desire on the writer's part to present perverted behaviour. In this context, they see Nūf's unnatural behaviour and wild sexual imagination as a direct result of her sexual repression.¹⁹

The story reaches its climax when Nūf, the heroine, is left in desperation by a lover who no longer believes in her or the revolution she supports.

I still believe that something will flourish out of the large Ḥazīrān (June) cemetery. You have built a ship of despair for yourself and launched it on the river of death. Now you are waving goodbye to us, and I would like to step out of your ship.²⁰

But Nūf's hopes are realized as she passes by the cemetery and hears men's voices. She imagines seeing the shadows of torches and candles and fragments of incomplete phrases --our secret work, liberation, land, sacrifice, comrades, pride, traitors. Candles here become a symbol of hope to continue the struggle, and the fragmented phrases signify continuous revolution. Later the heroine leaves the cemetery feeling that tomorrow she will have nothing to do with coffins. Al-Sammān ends the story on a hopeful note, i.e., the heroine looks to the blue sky, smells the

fresh sea air, and the fire in her skin lessens. In the same vein, when the heroine in "The Gray Danube" sees Fawwāz' photograph in the newspaper and reads the story that he is dead, her recurring vision of blood finally disappears and she leaves Paris with hope in her heart.

In the first story of this collection, al-Sammān discusses the political reality of the defeat by choosing examples of the undisputed authority of the upper class. However, this theme is also seen in the other stories, to a lesser extent, in the dialogue and characterization. For the most part, the rest of the stories reflect the social reality and the values practised in the society, which are, in themselves, a cause of the defeat. For example, in the story "Armalat al-Farah" (The Widow of Joy), Nīnār is a thirty-year old matron who lives a frivolous life without a single dream to her credit. Her father, a poet, deserts her mother for ten years, and later kills himself. Nīnār eventually falls in love with a doctor who is quite committed to his profession and is very close to his patients. As soon as Nīnār meets him, she begins to dream of a life with him. Although she is a member of a family who is heavily involved in underground activities, Nīnār herself does not approve of illegal practices, and expresses her dissatisfaction with her family's behaviour

in secret places. The story reaches its climax, however, in a violent fashion when the doctor-lover tries to suffocate Nīnār, after which she returns to her more realistic, conservative life.

In this story, we notice that al-Sammān writes knowledgeably about a specific class of people. It is clear that the fact that al-Sammān herself belongs to that class does not stop her in the least from criticizing its superficial values and pretentious appearances. One major criticism which she levels against the bourgeoisie is its lack of imagination, of ability to dream, as portrayed in the story's heroine, a thirty-year old dreamless woman who says: "Of course, I did not dream in the same way as others spoke of dreams; yet, all my life has been a long, silent, boring repetitive dream."²¹

The other statement that the author is making in this collection is the fact that the bourgeoisie is not capable of the simple, uncomplicated love affairs of the poorer classes. Rather, bourgeois people must involve themselves in complex relationships from which no one can derive simple enjoyment. For example, the love affair between the driver Abū-'Abdū and the maid Tuffāḥah is an example of a simple love affair. Tuffāḥah says to her lover Abū-'Abdū:

I wish the mistress would marry her lover with whom she goes out secretly each night, just as we are going to be married, you and I. Why is it that the bourgeois must have complicated love affairs?²²

Al-Sammān thus paints a very complicated picture of bourgeois life and tends to be sympathetic to the simple and the poor. It is no doubt the writer speaking when Abū-'Abdū replies to Tuffāḥah's question: "Leave off talking about them for they are pathetic people."²³

Al-Sammān seems to be warning the bourgeois about the working class:

I remember Tuffāḥah and Abū-'Abdū and their passionate night in the garden. I imagined their children inhabiting the castle and filling its rooms with their tribe, and throwing from the windows all the useless cutlery, and mother's wigs, along with my clothes. I imagined them playing with my jewels and the crystal fixtures, and imagined them singing and sowing the land, painting the walls, and the smell of the flowers and the music spread over and out of the dead castle.²⁴

Although al-Sammān criticizes the bourgeois for indulging in superficial relationships as far as love and

sex are concerned, she proclaims that the same relationships are true and quite realistic among the lower classes. Moreover, she prolongs the detailed sexual episodes unnecessarily between the poor driver Abū-'Abdū and the servant Tuffāḥah:

I saw two shadows engaged in a frightening embrace. I came quietly and silently close to them. The light of the moon was shining on the tops of the trees, and patches of light fell on the grass in front of Abū-'Abdū's hut, and lit the long hair of a woman lying on the ground shivering like the light of a candle as a man fell on top of her like a tree with his massive body. They became like two united waves, dancing an ethereal dance like legends, or like those mad with pain. I remained standing still looking at them with wonder. They became like a wave crashing fiercely against a rock, opening a tunnel into reality to eternal worlds where reality and dreams are one. They were not aware of my presence.²⁵

Al-Sammān's use of romantic language and style (as in the use of the imagery of waves, candles, and dreams, etc.) mixed with the more modern or popular expressions of a love scene (massive body, rock, tunnel, etc.) can be seen as an unavoidable stylistic slip on her part. On the other hand, we can see this style as a courageous attempt to introduce the Arab reader to a language

and themes which will shock him. In the past, any description of the sexual relationship took a negative twist, but this particular one is described, even with all of its shortcomings, in positive terms. Also, while Arab society condemns all premarital affairs, it is understood that this affair receives the writer's blessings.

I looked at the garden of my palace as if I had seen it for the first time, but I did not see it in the same way I am seeing it now. The smell of the soil, life, and music spread out of it, as if it was the voice of the seed growing under the soil, splitting it in order to come out. And there were Tuffāḥah and Abū-'Abdū who did not mar either the land or their reality.²⁶

Despite the insights into Arab society which al-Sammān gives us here, it must be conceded that she does, once again, engage herself in some generalizations. She grants the poor what she takes away from the rich. She claims that the poor can dream and love with no reservations, while the bourgeois are unable to do so. This, of course, is a mistaken generalization on her part which could have been avoided--for the rich are capable of loving and dreaming just as the poor, for dreams and love are commodities which are accessible to all. The reader also finds that al-Sammān goes into tiresome details about how the rich dress, live, and eat to further illustrate the

superficiality of their existence. Al-Sammān takes advantage of these descriptions to contrast the acquisition of material wealth with happiness:

My brother's departure made my rich mother miserable. She was always able to buy whatever she wanted to place in her room. But one thing she was not able to buy was my poet father.²⁷

The contrast in this quotation is very clear; the poet is a symbol of the natural and unobtainable on the one hand, and the things bought for the mother's room are a symbol of the material and the available on the other hand. Through the discussion of the social issues, al-Sammān sheds light on the national issues throughout the story:

Tuffāḥah says that she is from 'Itā al-Sha'b, a village in the south of Lebanon, close to the Israeli border. She listens to the radio while she is tidying up my room because she is afraid of the Jews for her people. She wants to be assured about them, but today she has heard that a military attack has taken place and many were killed.²⁸

From the above, the reader notices that national issues are confined to the lower class; love of the country is not a concern of the rich.

I beg you, my lady, please read to me the names of the dead in my village. Perhaps my father is

one of them. I am from 'Itā al-Sha'b and the Jews attack us constantly.²⁹

Al-Sammān continues her criticism of the bourgeois in her story "Jarīmat Sharaf" (A Crime of Honour). Like the previous story, she chooses her characters from two different classes: Lady Ferdalona and her driver Abū 'Alī. She illustrates the differences in social status by contrasting the wealth of the castle with the poverty of the tent. She further presents these differences by describing their possessions--the cadillacs, the French cooks, private drivers, and dogs. In fact, Lady Ferdalona's dog plays a very important role in the story; while the bourgeois are busy preparing for the dog beauty contest, the poor and less fortunate are being bombarded from the skies and the ground.

There the land burns and the men die, while here the men dance and the dogs bathe and are beautified and worshipped. Parties take place in their honour.³⁰

As in her other works, the woman in this story is seen by the author as a victim. Here the theme focuses on the action of the male, the brother, who goes out of his way to murder his pregnant sister Khaḍrā to defend his traditions, honour and belief. It is seen as more important, criticizes al-Sammān, to sacrifice a woman in

the name of preserving her honour (virginity)³¹ than to die while defending the land as it is being attacked.

They do not want her blood. They want the land, they want my land, my home, and my tobacco. This is my honour, but my son murmured: "What is important is the girl's honour."³²

The strange turn of events in this story comes to a head when the dog is slain from ear to ear as a symbol of punishment. In this context, the author is attempting to portray the sense of injustice which is the result of blindly adhering to irrelevant values and traditions to the detriment of the resolution of the real issues. Al-Sammān is also quite critical here of the lower class as well as the bourgeoisie, for she does not share the lower class' mindless attachment to hollow terms like honour, dignity, and justice. She also points out that these acts are really "crimes", and as such do not help society, but are actually quite beneficial to the Israeli enemy who remains free to roam about in Lebanon. She again asserts that the Arabs lay too much emphasis on the wrong values.

Rafīf Fattūḥ is another writer who deals with the same problems as al-Sammān to make the reader conscious of what the Arabs have always neglected, if not suppressed.

This is evidenced in a close look at one of the short stories "al-'Ubūr". (The Crossing) in Bayrūt al-Aziqqah wa al-Maṭar (Beirut, the Alleys and Rain).

The men's hands pull the trigger of light [i.e., the gun as a symbol of the light of freedom]. Stād dū Shāylā is teeming with dogs while the hands of light [i.e., guns] exploded with the scent of the earth. The fragrance of imported perfumes emanates from dogs luxuriously kept by pretty ladies, while the hands [of fighters] falloff, still erect with the sign of victory. All the while the hands of a society pre-occupied with vain entertainment clap in applause for the best elected dog.³³

What strikes the reader most here is that Rafīf Fattūḥ's stories deal with the same injustice as that of al-Sammān's stories. That is, there is a basic dehumanization of most of the characters in both writers despite the triviality of the subject matter of the stories themselves.

Al-Sammān, however, does not succeed in obtaining the sympathy of the reader in this comparative social study. If there is any sympathy for the lower class, it is simply expressed in the sexual scenes throughout the collection of her short stories. The reader must be aware, though, that this is not really sympathy for a specific type of sexual relationship, but sympathy for

the subject of sexuality in general--a subject which, it must be emphasized, al-Sammān is anxious to bring to the attention of the Arab reader.

In "'Adhrā' Bayrūt" (The Virgin of Beirut), the author deals extensively with the subject of honour. She chooses as her characters here two teen-age girls to illustrate the importance of honour, and has both girls fall in love with a rich youth from the neighbourhood. After reading a popular book by one writer on modern sexual ethics and habits, they feel that their virginity is perhaps not as important as their society has made it out to be. They thus decide that they should engage in sexual practices for their greater knowledge and experience. To this end, they visit the philandering youth next door who gladly helps them to lose their virginity.

It seems that this story belongs to the first collection and not to the present one simply because it deals only with the Arab woman's life away from the political and national scene. Further, it deals only superficially with honour, virginity, and the marital life of the Arab woman, and does not look deeply at the roots of the problem for which viable solutions could be sought. Through these characters, al-Sammān tells us that there is no maturity on the part of Arab society, as far as sexual

liberation is concerned. What is ironic in this story, however, is the simplicity and lightheadedness with which the two girls conduct their affairs; both are aware of their affair with the same man and the fact that they were motivated to sleep with him after reading an erotic book. This part of the story is neither realistic nor convincing, and thus detracts from the main point of the story, that is, the immaturity of society on the subject of sexuality, and the emptiness of the values which society is attempting to uphold.

"Welcome my bridegroom--the merchandise is ready," my mother whispers in my ear: "Listen, daughter, ask him tonight to buy you a building. Tonight and not tomorrow. Tomorrow and not the day after. Take whatever you can out of him before he is bored; men get bored very fast, and the rich get bored before the poor do. A woman's wing is broken and opportunity knocks only once in life."³⁴

Al-Sammān is very satirical here on the subject of honour and virginity. As soon as the girls lose their virginity, they are quite capable of restoring it by surgical operation, provided they pay the right price.

I used to invite them to attend my wedding, I am the virgin of technology and they are the primitive tribe who still stand in front of the doors to beg for a rag stained with blood which the bridegroom

comes out with at dawn. It reassures them that it is all well with the universe.³⁵

As previously noted, al-Sammān centers her discussion on the sexual liberation of the Arab woman and very little else, but sexual liberation in most cases does not lead to intellectual or psychological liberation--something which the Arab world is very much in need of. The repetition of the experience, however, does not provide the Arab woman with the liberation al-Sammān refers to. This point of view does not seem convincing to the reader, however; neither is it convincing that the Arab girl should restore her virginity simply because the man she is about to marry wishes it so. What is a more reasonable, believable, and mature solution to this dilemma is al-Sammān's request that the Arab man must himself mature, and reconsider his stand as far as "honourable" and "non-honourable" women are concerned. In an almost comic twist, the story ends by having the two teen-age heroines, after all their trials and tribulations, return to the writer of the erotic book, and hold her responsible for their actions. In responding to their claim that the book itself drove them to miscalculated action, the author replies in a very existential manner:

The situation, then, is that you have lost the man

you have loved because you have given yourselves to him. But this is a natural problem every liberated girl must experience in our transitional society. The Eastern man is still afraid of the woman who gives. He still considers love and giving as obscene and this is why he does not marry the woman who loves him and gives herself to him. He prefers the woman he buys, as that is what provides him with stability and ownership.³⁶

"Al-Sā'atān wa al-Ghurāb" (The Crow and the Two Time Zones) is a story in this collection which belongs to the period of revolution and not that of defeat. It centers around the revolutionary man and his struggle against exploitation, backwardness, and colonialism. More specifically, it represents a sympathetic consciousness of the revolution in Yemen. In this story, al-Sammān chooses 'Īdah ('Āyidah), a young woman among bourgeois ladies whose father is one of the Sultans in Aden. She receives her monthly cheques from home while she attends a convent boarding school in Geneva where she studies and receives Swiss citizenship. The heroine here adjusts her watch in keeping with her split personality. The Geneva time zone indicates the bourgeois presence and the Aden time zone indicates the social revolutionary.

Al-Sammān gives us detail on the heroine's background in an attempt to explain the personality she has

developed. Her mother is not of the same class as her father and 'Īdah does not recognize her as her mother, but merely as a servant to her father. As soon as the mother is dead, the father sends 'Īdah to the most expensive schools in Europe, and thereafter 'Īdah sees him merely as a bank account. 'Īdah is obliged to undertake some self-assessment, however, when she is sent to Aden to report on the events of the revolution for a Swiss newspaper. Here she is pulled between East and West, between Ricardo, a Swiss lover she has become involved with, and Fāḍil, the leader of the revolution in Aden. Finally, she chooses Fāḍil over Ricardo, yet she is not able to remain with him in revolutionary Aden. As she returns to Switzerland, she adjusts her watch to Fāḍil's time zone.

Al-Sammān touches on a very important issue when she refers to Ricardo's Spanish ancestry and the ties between the Spaniards and the Arabs. She states that the intermarriage between Arabs and non-Arabs may have lessened the Arabism in Ricardo throughout history, while Fāḍil remains a pure Arab with pure Arab blood. As is said to 'Īdah regarding her final choice: "It is the Arab blood in him that pulls you to him. Despite all your preferences, you are still an Arab woman from the desert."³⁷

Even after the sexual affair the heroine experi-

ences with Ricardo, 'Idah refuses to believe that she has become a European though she has studied, lived, and made love to a European in a European factory. If the factory furnace is to be seen as a symbol of the desert, then the heroine is indeed closer to her Arab roots on the floor of the European factory than to her European reality as the author suggests. The most important point that al-Samman makes here, though, is that the Arab woman who travels to the West and gains some life experience cannot deny that she brings with her an abundance of emotional ties from her native land. While in Europe, however, she becomes intellectually tied to the West. The real question then is: what is the woman, whose emotions are in one place, and intellect in the other, to do?

Near the spouting furnace, I gave my body and I dreamt that I was in a suburb of Şan'ā' . . . ; I was Laylā who was able to be Qays's, and I was 'Ablah in 'Antarah's arms, and I was Sheherezade who stopped her tale (allowed by night) to enter into things unspoken, to cross the bridge to ecstasy of things unspoken and passed under the bridge to the land of revelation. I have been all women in Şan'ā' and all their lusts which travel from the narrow streets of my city to the warmth of the desert in the nights of Yemen . . . but now I realize that I was not making love to you. I was making love to the warm desert under me. I was unified with the memory of my country. Truly, I was

never European.³⁸

There is a great similarity between this story and the story "Yā Dimashq" in Layl al-Ghurabā'. Here the real problem of women appears to be sexual. Through it, the heroine enters unknown worlds of revolution or visions of revolution unified by sex and man, realized through time and emotion. But when the man disappears, the unification and the revolution are over, and their fusion is thus seen through intellectual, realistic, and social individuals, not through sexual connections. All of this makes this story flat in texture because it is transitional ultimately, as far as relationships are concerned. 'Īdah, the heroine, is not a true leftist, despite her being a member of a revolutionary group and despite her chauvinism. She criticizes the bourgeoisie and yet chooses to remain a bourgeois herself; on this same point, however, she does at one point wish that her father would "kill his class, and his secret account in the Swiss bank."³⁹

'Īdah, as the heroine, is seen as extremely enthusiastic about the revolution in the South of Yemen. She supports it as an individual, but she does not support it as an idea. The Arab woman, here, is not seen as she truly is, and al-Sammān's portrait is not completely accurate if she is indeed attempting to portray the modern liberation

picture. The heroine, in this context, does not seem totally committed to fighting for the revolution, for she is content to return to Switzerland, run the streets, and adjust her watch to Fāḍil's time zone. This adjustment in time is clearly a symbol of Aden's time and a symbol of the struggle of the revolutionaries in Aden.

I will run to the flowers' clock. I will cut all the flowers and spit on them. No land has the right to plant flowers if there is a place in this world with no wheat. I will stop the hands of the clock.⁴⁰

Although Raḥīl al-Marāfi' al-Qadīmah sheds light on some important issues like the 1967 defeat and Arab revolution, it must be noted that al-Sammān has not yet been able to bring her characters in this collection to face reality and ultimately find solutions to their problems. As in her earlier works, the characters here are still "running away". In some cases, she has her character abandon their revolutionary stand and concentrate on their individual concerns. It can be said, however, that her personal feelings and emotions are intertwined with her perception of certain Arab issues, thus resulting in some generalizations and some limited character development in her stories.

In her depiction of woman in this collection, we

find her unable to give a clear picture of either the Arab woman or the European woman. Al-Sammān seems to have a problem coming to terms with the true identity of the Arab woman, as illustrated in her depiction of the female characters in these stories. She portrays her female characters far from the actual reality of the life of the Arab woman. She treats the plight of the Arab woman mainly from a bourgeois point of view. Thus, she was unable to enter into the real problems of the Arab woman in the various and disparate classes of her society. Dissatisfied with the role of the traditional Arab woman and unhappy with the "lostness" of the promiscuous new Arab woman, al-Sammān is almost contradictory in her criticism of Eastern and Western women.

NOTES

¹Al-Sammān, Raḥīl, p. 7.

²Ibid., p. 11.

³Ibid., pp. 13-4.

⁴Ibid., p. 15.

⁵Ibid., p. 17.

⁶Ibid., p. 36.

⁷Ibid.

⁸Ibid., p. 23.

⁹Yāsīn and Sulaymān, al-Adab, p. 75.

¹⁰Shukrī, Ghādah al-Sammān, p. 54.

¹¹Ibid., p. 52.

¹²Yāsīn and Sulaymān, al-Adab, p. 73.

¹³Al-Sammān, Raḥīl, p. 69. There are some similarities between "al-Dānūb al-Ramādī" and Khanātah Banūnah's novel al-Nār wa al-Ikhtiyār (The Fire and the Choice) in which Banūnah portrays the Arab defeat, its causes and effects. The heroine announcer, Mudā, in al-Sammān's "al-Dānūb al-Ramādī" plays the same role as Laylā in Banūnah's al-Nār wa al-Ikhtiyār, for both heroines announced the same false news of the 1967 war and its result and felt guilty about it. Banūnah sees the Arab world as a corpse,

while al-Sammān sees it as a grave and the Arab people as corpses. Although both writers do not reach the same level of revolutionary stand in their writings, al-Sammān is superior to Banūnah intellectually and artistically. For further details, see Khanātah Banūnah, al-Nār wa al-Ikhti-yār (al-Dār al-Bayḍā': Dār al-Kitāb, 1970); see also Shukrī 'Azīz Māḍī, In'ikās Hazīmat Hazīrān 'alā al-Riwāyah al-'Arabīyah (Beirut: al-Mu'assasah al-'Arabīyah li al-Dirā-sāt wa al-Nashr, 1978), pp. 79-82.

¹⁴Al-Sammān, Raḥīl, p. 78.

¹⁵Ibid., p. 68.

¹⁶Ibid., p. 74.

¹⁷Ibid., p. 79.

¹⁸Farrāj, al-Ḥurriyah, p. 105.

¹⁹Yāsīn and Sulaymān, al-Adab, p. 78.

²⁰Al-Sammān, Raḥīl, p. 86.

²¹Ibid., p. 42.

²²Ibid., p. 57.

²³Ibid.

²⁴Ibid., p. 54.

²⁵Ibid., p. 47.

²⁶Ibid., p. 48.

²⁷Ibid., p. 44.

²⁸Ibid., p. 54.

²⁹Ibid., pp. 53-4.

³⁰Ibid., p. 108.

³¹Ibid., p. 111.

³²Ibid., p. 37. See also idem, "al-Dānūb al-Ramādī," Raḥīl, p. 22.

³³Raḥīf Fattūḥ, Bayrūt al-Aziqqah wa al-Maṭar (Beirut: Manshūrāt Zuhayr Ba'albakī, 1974), p. 51.

³⁴Al-Sammān, Raḥīl, p. 161.

³⁵It is an old Arab custom that after the nuptial night the bride's mother displays the blood-stained sheet to the bridegroom's family to prove the virginity of her daughter before the consummation of the marriage.

³⁶Al-Sammān, Raḥīl, p. 157.

³⁷Ibid., p. 120.

³⁸Ibid., p. 118.

³⁹Ibid., p. 125.

⁴⁰Ibid., p. 145.

CHAPTER V

POST-1967 WORKS: BAYRŪT 75

In Bayrūt 75, al-Sammān deals with many of the same issues which appeared in her earlier works, such as discrimination, sexual oppression of women, the concept of honour in modern Arab society, injustice, political corruption, and tribal revenge. In this novel, however, the author deals with these issues as they relate directly to Lebanese society in general, and Beirut in particular just before the Lebanese civil war erupted. In this context, al-Sammān's novel is almost prophetic in that its characterization and setting laid bare the complex and corrupt roots of the current strife. It is to be noted that women's issues are not an overriding concern here but are taken up by al-Sammān more as part of an entire social setting than as a separate and distinct topic unto itself.

As we will see in this chapter, Bayrūt 75 is also a reflection of the development of al-Sammān as a writer. As this was the author's first novel, she is to be commended for its incisive criticism of society. Unlike some of her earlier works (short stories), the novel gives realistic characterizations of how the innocent

and poor are corrupted and cheated in an unjust society. Despite the greater realism in her characters, however, it must also be noted that it is difficult at times to distinguish between the reality and the dream in this novel, as the author moves very quickly between the two. This, of course, is a reflection of the confusion in society at the time. This confusion, in fact, climaxes at the end of the novel in a nightmare sequence of blood, the city's welcoming sign being transformed into the name of a local insane asylum. If one is to read symbols correctly, al-Sammān is telling us that suffering and struggle do not end in Bayrūt 75 but will continue in Kawābīs Bayrūt (Nightmares of Beirut), her next book.

The bey thinks that his beautiful little apartment is there to be used and it contains a beautiful blonde female tourist--the prettiest butterfly among the foreigners. He prefers the blonde foreigners. Dealing with foreigners seems easier for him because involvement with them leaves no trace of attachment. It is true that his Arab female friends are warmer and more sincere, but they are very passive and are wont to fall in love with every man they encounter. They also have a tendency of turning their desires into problems. The bey does not have time for problems. The female foreigners understand life better. To them, "business is business", and they do not suffer a

setback when they see and understand his needs, whereas the Arab women consider his ideas and needs abnormal.¹

As in her previous works, al-Sammān focuses here on the differences in psychology between the Arab woman and her Western counterpart. In this particular excerpt, however, it should be pointed out that this picture is seen not from the woman's point of view but from and through her relationship to the man. The author nevertheless illustrates the differences between the Eastern and the Western female, the former depending quite heavily upon a man's love for her identity and purpose in life, and the latter perceiving the relationship as a commercial transaction--a specific commodity for a specific price. Although the reader is not informed as to exactly what constitutes these differences, al-Sammān makes it clear that the differences definitely exist; and emphasizes that the Arab man himself is quite aware of these differences and uses them to the best advantage. Further, it is not clear whether the writer's knowledge of these differences is a result of personal experience or merely a reaction against Western cultural influence in the Arab world.

What a work of art man's body is! Why haven't women known it before? Why do they believe legends like the one that says woman, as an animal, is

more beautiful than man? Why do they not once look at the beauty of a man's body and its legendary formation? Man is the most beautiful and greatest animal of the jungle.²

It is apparent that the first line of this paragraph is an allusion to the famous soliloquy in Shakespeare's Hamlet. The remainder of al-Sammān's monologue differs from that of Hamlet, however, since Shakespeare marvels at the beauty of the human body while al-Sammān's concern lies in her revolutionary vision and her conception of the new Arab man. Traditionally, the woman has been viewed and appreciated for her physical beauty while the man has been appreciated for his strength and physical power. Previously, al-Sammān also verbalizes what has only been felt and thought by her sex, that is, woman's longing to appreciate and enjoy the beauty of the male body in the same way men have always appreciated and enjoyed the female body.

I started to cry and he stopped me with a kiss. Then we went to the casino to gamble, as he usually gambles when he is angry or pretending to be so. The trip to the casino was pre-arranged. There, an important bey came up to us, greeted us and introduced his daughter to him, a girl with an ordinary face wearing extraordinary jewellery. And when I heard her name-- Miss Nā'ilah al-Salamūnī--, Mr. Salamūnī's

his personal political and social advantage.

I have crossed all the bridges. I have stopped walking. It is true that he spends his money generously on me, and I spend his money on my brother who pretends that he does not see what is going on around him because of my money.⁴

Al-Sammān, as illustrated in the above passage, emphasizes the hypocrisy and injustice of the moral standards which exist in Arab society. In the story line, the heroine's brother does not judge her actions or lifestyle at all while he is in constant receipt of the money profited from her illicit relationship with her lover. When the money flow is stopped, however, only then do morality and honour enter the picture, and only then must the heroine die--in the name of honour. As well as the social and material differences here, the author highlights the emotional differences between man and woman in terms of sexual relations and their perception of them in a society whose moral code is one-sided. The relationship of the heroine and her lover was clear prostitution in that her sexual services provided an income for her brother. Al-Sammān emphasizes that in such relationship, the Arab woman can only be a loser within the social and moral environment of Arab society.

Those men do not know how much a woman suffers as she waits for a lover; she herself does not know where he is. Every moment passes painfully as doubt erupts; there is not a more active imagination than the imagination of a jealous woman.⁵

If the pain of the Arab woman who allows herself to engage in an illicit sexual relationship is not physical pain, al-Sammān informs us that it is surely psychological torture and mental anguish which she experiences. The doubts which arise out of her dilemma are due to the uncertainty of her relationship with the man she loves. Note in the following passage how the author skillfully brings the issues of injustice, the double-standard moral code, and the inferiority of women in the Arab world to a crisis point, forcing the reader to face this very dramatic problem in the Middle East, i.e., the sexual differences between men and women.

--Beirut did not ruin you. You all reproach Beirut, but the seeds of ruin are inside you. All Beirut has done was to bring them out in the open and give them a place to grow.

--But I am not a prostitute. I love you, and in the beginning of our relationship you always mentioned marriage.

--Marriage? You fool. Do you believe that I can

marry a woman who gave herself to me before marriage?

--Why not? Didn't you proudly tell me that you advised your father to list equality and liberation of women among his priorities when he ran for election?

He did not answer, but muttered: "Would I marry a woman I slept with before marriage and before the wedding night?"

--Why not? But you may want to imitate your friend Nīshān whom you always mock for the coldness of his wife--the daughter of an immigrant millionaire--who drove him to the arms of boys.

But of course he did not listen to her talking, as if she did not say anything. He turned around and went to sleep.

How can he go to sleep so peacefully. How can they plunge the knife into the heart of a lover and then go to sleep without breaking into pieces or becoming restless like us (women).⁶

The author characterizes this problem with the arrogant, unfaithful man who, once he has fulfilled himself sexually, feels perfectly justified in disposing of his prey. Al-Sammān, however, is not the only writer who is aware of this problem. Other female writers have expressed their dismay with the traditions, both religious and cultural, which reinforce the superiority of the male over the female.⁷

Al-Sammān and others emphasize that there seem to be some unwritten rules which bewitch and hypnotize the inhabitants of the Arab world from one end to the other. These rules dictate that it is a duty and a privilege for the Arab man, as well as a sign of manhood, to indulge in sexual activities at any time and any place, and that it is legitimate for him to do so since this increases his sexual experience and sexual prowess. As in the case of the hero of Bayrūt 75, the Arab male is brought up with this consciousness and finds it almost impossible to change his attitude, despite the fact that his formal education and experience may have taught him otherwise. It must be particularly noted here that religion has a very distinct perspective on inequality between the sexes.⁸

For women, however, none of the above privileges applies, as they are required to remain virgins until their wedding night. If they show any interest or experience in sexual matters before marriage they are considered either "fallen women" or prostitutes, and are thus denied matrimony, cast off as undesirable candidates for marriage. Even within marriage, the author points out, a woman is not supposed to enjoy sex, but merely be an instrument of reproduction.

But she cannot believe that what has happened to her

has really taken place. She is like his wife; she loves him, lives with him and is faithful to him. She gives him everything, and does not want anything in this world except him. She was still a virgin until he had her. She did not know any other man. Why then doesn't he marry her?⁹

The confessional technique used here by al-Sammān illustrates the vulnerability and emotion of the heroine. It is clearly a human cry the woman is uttering, not about unrequited love--but rather, about unfulfilled promises. The man, of course, does not and will not marry her for traditional, religious, and moral reasons applicable to women only. This psychological revelation indicates that women are indeed suffering inequality; they know it, dream about it, lament it, and for a time it becomes the only reality in their lives. This psychological revelation plays a great part in understanding the heroine's emotions and the state of her mind. The despair which she feels envelops her and causes her to wonder if the results would have been the same if she had been more promiscuous:

If I had known another man before Namir, if they had let my body enjoy an equal relationship in Damascus, would I have been this lost?¹⁰

As she continues to dwell on the subject, we find the heroine attaching almost as much importance to the act of

sex itself as the man does. However, al-Sammān clearly outlines the background and the reasons for the Arab woman's sudden interest in sex and insistence on sexual equality:

I loved it [sex]. I became addicted to it. I longed for it. For twenty-seven years I have been forbidden to enjoy sex and here I am today, sick and perverted. I have devoted myself to bed, and in my blood dwells the desires of all Arab women for the last thousand years, and I am not able to resume sex as a part of me. I am defeated, and sex has taken over all of my being. I shivered during the night I spent in my brother's house, away from his body; I shivered like a forgotten addict. I lose every attempt at being sane. I see my madness and I see my mistake. I also see very clearly how I can escape my folly, but I am incapable of it. They have forgotten that they stripped me of my resistance when they imprisoned me in their traditions... I am consumed by the river of fire which envelops me, the burning river of Awe. I frighten him away by my desire to have him. He does not understand that I am not a prostitute, but my hunger for his body is more than a thousand years old. I smell the scent of autumn in the air. The wind blows cold. Has my summer ended forever?¹¹

Al-Sammān's heroine stands here as a representative of the suppressed woman in the Arab world. This sexual suppression, instead of discouraging the woman from indulging in sexual activities, actually pressures her into

corruption and perversion. It also weakens her rational faculties and releases her unchannelled emotions into some form of madness. As this behaviour is closely connected to the traditional socio-religious values, society, asserts al-Sammān, is responsible for the heroine's behaviour, and should therefore stop the name-calling. In this episode, the writer also presents us with a sense of history as far as the suppression of women is concerned on the one hand, and women's desire and hunger for sexual activities, on the other.

Namir asks Nīshān proudly: "What do you think of her?" He answered disgustingly: "She is a little fat and doesn't know how to dress properly."

Namir: "But her breasts are beautiful and exciting."

Nīshān: "You know that I don't care about her breasts. I am not attracted to women. All that is really required of her is to make an appearance with Farah or myself in certain places, nothing more. [She is] for appearances' sake only. She is only required to know how to dress well. It seems to me that she only knows how to take her clothes off, but this is a service that I do not ask of her. . . ."

Nīshān was disgusted as he began to look at Yāsaminah. He said: "How ugly women are! They leave spots of rouge and mascara on the pillows. They often stain the bed sheets with other things! Man is clean and

beautiful and does not leave any filth behind him. He is the most beautiful animal in nature! But business is business. I will build my empire no matter what.¹²

Nīshān's problem, on the surface, is not very complicated. He dislikes women and expresses his dislike in a variety of ways, as seen in his calling the woman a 'cow' and his disgusting description of the parts and operation of the female anatomy. Although his homosexuality is revealed here and in other episodes, what is puzzling to the reader is the fact that he is so intensely repelled and disgusted by the female bodily functions. Not only he cannot tolerate these very human functions, but he is also disgusted by the symbol of womanhood and motherhood, the breasts. One can only assume that Nīshān suffers from latent immaturity, and has an Oedipal attachment from which he is unable to free himself. This is stated since it is indeed strange that a grown man should be so repelled by any reminder of his mother, specifically her breasts, makeup, or menstrual cycle. Al-Sammān suggests that what drives him into the arms of his male lovers is not the frigidity of his female escorts but his own Oedipus complex. He praises the beauty of his male lovers' bodies and marvels at their complexity, simply because the male body does not represent a threat to his own nature.

Nīshān is particularly attracted to Farah's masculinity and the strength which he displays, in relationship to which he can quite safely play the feminine role.

In the characterization of Namir, Nīshān, and Fā-dīl Bey al-Salamūnī, the author gives us a very vivid picture of the bourgeoisie, their life, and their attitude to their fellowmen. Al-Sammān demonstrates the vast differences between the classes, differences which allow the landowners and the rich to make and break the law, and to use and abuse whomever they come into contact with. They discriminate against the working class and drag each and every one into their petty concerns and wars. Men and women alike become their victims and whoever presents a threat to their regime is simply destroyed. They do not care about the poverty and sickness which the working class experiences. An example of this can be seen in the fisherman, Abū Muṣṭafā, who suffers from tuberculosis, but does not receive any sympathy or help from the bourgeois. Al-Sammān concludes with dramatic objectivity that the poor, especially women, cannot survive as human beings in such a society. She repeatedly recreates the discrimination and the injustice which the poor suffer from, in scenes such as this:

Mustafā's relationship with all living beings was not

broken; instead, it had gone to sleep and in its place was a bond that tied him to all the suffering fish on earth like his father and himself--those who were lost in the harsh labyrinth of life in Beirut. Those were forced to swim in the sewers despite their longing for freedom, sunlight, and fresh water. He was busy fighting alongside the Sakīnī and the Salamūnī families, and their class which takes the food from his mouth. His romantic ear was no longer able to listen to the cry of the fish in the net. He now listens to the moaning of people around him and to his own, to the moaning of the men who face the storm, the sea, darkness, and the elements, while Namir al-Sakīnī and his class lie asleep in their yachts.¹³

Al-Sammān tells us that all the dreams and the inspiration of the poor have been taken away. Yet there remains with the poor fisherman one single dream: that one day he will find a crystal ball, rub it, and have a genie that will appear and grant him whatever he wishes. This legend is quite common among the poor and underprivileged. This kind of myth becomes a reality in the poor people's lives simply because any other reality is quite painful and disillusioning. Moreover, it may lead to their death.

For thirty years, he [Abū Muṣṭafā] fought the waves, looking for the genie. For thirty years he cast his net and searched its contents for the crystal ball. . . . He threw his net and lit the dynamite, all that he had of it. And before he heard his son's and the men's

cries, he jumped into the water. His body became an explosion of dynamite to catch the crystal ball. Muṣṭafā's scream was heard as the dynamite exploded. Even the water roared, and then everything became calm. The waves became dark. A torn corpse was seen on the surface of the water next to the torn nets.¹⁴

Once again, in this passage, al-Sammān presents the reader with the contrast of the lives of the classes in Beirut through Yāsaminah's consciousness. When she was forced to leave Namir's house to go to Nīshān's she was visibly frightened by the poor man, so great was her fear of personal poverty. This fear became a part of her being, as she always shuddered at the possibility of being married to a poor man. She had become accustomed to a life of luxury and extravagance and could not imagine a life with a poor man who snored all night. Nor could she imagine herself running after children all day. After her experience with wealth, she could never think of returning to a state of poverty and deprivation. But for now, she had to decide whether she would move into Nīshān's apartment or move to her brother's place. She had, in the end, to choose between being a withering lover or a successful prostitute.

In the end, Yāsaminah is killed by her brother, and the admissible evidence is conveniently destroyed. In this instance, we see that the death of the poor must pass un-

defended and unnoticed in the face of the bribes of the wealthy Namir. If there indeed was any attempt to defend honour on the part of Yāsaminah's brother, it was quickly bought out by Namir's move to silence the truth of the affair. Al-Sammān very graphically illustrates in this case just how hollow the concept of honour is in Arab society:

I am Namir Fāris al-Sakīnī. How can you claim that I disgraced your honour, you dog. It should be an honour to you that I, the son of Sakīnī, slept with your sister. . . . The first file has been destroyed. They will soon interrogate you again, and you will repeat what you had said, that you killed your sister for honour. You will have to forget my name completely. . . . You will say that she had affairs with several other men. Do not mention my name, but accuse her of practising prostitution with many strangers.¹⁵

Namir's wealth helps him to reverse the truth, and his bribes assist him in twisting the evidence in the crime against Yāsaminah. As emphasized by the author then, there can be no hope for the poor or for women in a society which is controlled by wealth and ancient traditions of false honour. She reiterates in this and other works the point that the upper class controls every single facet of society. The wealthy make the laws as well as break them, all to their own advantage. They legislate health and welfare

regulations, manipulate retirement pension funds and ensure that any action of the "unions" which they have allowed to exist does not create any opposition or problems for management. All of this leaves the lower class with no room to maneuver:

The registered retirement savings plan has been established for the ministers and the President on the one hand and for ourselves on the other hand. This legislation will guarantee protection for the ministers, M.P.'s, and all others (those who care for the welfare of their constituents).¹⁶

Perhaps this savings plan is a good idea, but if there was and is no money to be saved--as in the case of the poor--it is of no use. The poor thus suffer to no end, and their poverty increases daily. As far as they are concerned, their labour and toil are fruitless.

We do not own freezers nor do we own co-ops to store our fish. Instead, we are obliged to sell at a price dictated by Fāḡil al-Salamūnī, and Namir al-Sakīnī. The fisherman has no protection. He is owned by the rich man who buys whatever we catch and who, in turn, dictates his own prices. We do not own freezers. Nor do we own co-ops. . . . The fisherman is subjected to death, and his family is subjected to estrangement. No unions, no retirement plans, absolutely nothing.¹⁷

The reader may question the accurateness of

al-Sammān's portrayal of the life of the poor, and may wonder if she is merely generalizing on the strength of what could be a particular situation. Do the poor really have nothing in life to look forward to? Do they live and survive without aspiration or ambition? Al-Sammān exploits this picture of despair in her description of the sexuality of the poor. After emphasizing the frustration which the fisherman and the rest of the poor experience, she elaborates on the fact that there is no release or pleasure other than sex that one can have when faced with such poverty. It is, she asserts, a pleasure created out of frustration and despair. Ironically, however, the price of sexual release is very high--it is another mouth to feed, since birth control and family planning are not available to this class.

Al-Sammān details other aspects of the fisherman's poverty, emphasizing that it is all-encompassing and affects the lives of all members of the family. Since poverty also means poor housing, the fisherman and his family find themselves living in a shabby tenement where the entire family eat, drink, and sleep in one single room. This unhealthy atmosphere in al-Sammān's view is criminal and perverse, as the children are forced to watch or at least listen to their parents' intercourse. The children sub-

sequently engage in repetitive masturbation and become incapable of forming healthy relationships with their friends.

Whenever my father is not able to fish and returns from the sea disappointed, he goes back to hunt the golden bird in my mother's garden. The result is a new mouth to be fed, and a new body thrown in our narrow room. My father wages his war in bed, and I eat my heart out sexually. I cannot even communicate with the girl I love.¹⁸

Throughout the story, the author relates class problems in Arab society to national problems. The Arab peasant safeguards the land of the country he lives in; he will live and die to protect his home and family. The rich do not care about the land nor about the national struggle, however, and do not bother to involve themselves in such matters. The rich even use Israeli words to express their disillusion with the proletariat. He calls the Palestinian commandos (fidā'iyīn) terrorists just like the Israelis. In this context, one of the M.P.'s tells his poor peasant:

I always advised you and warned the people of the village not to hide the "terrorists", and you haven't stopped. You call them "fidā'iyīn" but they are the cause of the destruction of the village.¹⁹

Later, when the peasant questions the M.P.'s sincerity and awareness of his electorate by quoting a verse from the Qur'ān: "Say: Do and God, His Prophet, and the faithful will see your deed," the peasant received a slap on the face and was told by the M.P. to shut up.

Another picture al-Sammān draws for the reader is the state of mental anguish and frustration experienced by Abū al-Mallā. He cannot seem to tolerate the struggle and the confusion he lives in. Although he is employed as a watchman for valuable statues and his daughters are employed as servants in the palaces of the rich, he has a very hard time trying to choose between his duty to guard the valuable statues and the temptation of selling one of them to prevent his third daughter from becoming a servant. Instead of deciding between good and evil, however, Abū al-Mallā begins to talk to one of the statues every day, and eventually, the statue causes Abū al-Mallā's death. Up to the end, Abū al-Mallā was convinced that the differences between the poor and the rich classes were a natural phenomenon, but the shock of sending his third daughter to serve in the palaces of the rich made him change his attitude. Moreover, he became aware of his poverty and the rich surroundings and the despicable neighbourhood he lived in, as described in the following

scene:

His country? He still holds in his pocket an I.D. which is still under review despite the fact that he was born here and will die here! His history? He knows nothing else but his putrid present. Three of his daughters work as servants in the palaces of the rich, and the wages of his sons are not sufficient to buy their food.²⁰

It is very important to note here that this situation is created out of the need of the poor for some kind of social expression. As we see the depth of the conflict in Abū al-Mallā's consciousness, we become aware of the social and material pressures on the poor and the ease and the luxury of the rich. Abū al-Mallā dies as a result of a heart attack but his neurotic state probably played a larger role in his destruction than one would like to think. His suffocation by the tight collar of his shirt and the marks that the collar left on his neck are explained by his trusting son as not being the deed of the anthropomorphic statue.

Revenge is another issue discussed by al-Sammān, in which the Arab man is obsessed with this emotion whenever he is subjected to defend one principle or another. For this purpose, the author presents us with the character of Ṭi'ān who becomes a pharmacist after his graduation

from a foreign university. Despite his formal education, however, Ṭi'ān is trapped in the traditions of his society and thus becomes the victim of revengeful circumstances. Al-Sammān's satirical narrative at this point helps the reader to understand the hateful and destructive principle of revenge in the Arab world, i.e., "an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth." In this instance, Ṭi'ān himself has no control over his life; he is unfortunately an educated member of his tribe and thus meets the specifications of the individual who must be killed for revenge by the opposing tribe. Until he dies, however, he lives in a clear state of paranoia in which he imagines that a person is always following him:

Do you think that I am hallucinating? I imagine that every man in the street is following me! My nerves are finished. I must withdraw to my hideout. I must...²¹

In the beginning of the novel, al-Sammān chooses Beirut as a haven. Most of her characters dream of the wealth and luxury awaiting them in Beirut. Farah, for one, claims that he will return to Damascus rich and famous. Yāsaminah also prematurely claims that she will also return in the same manner, as she had had enough of her life as a teacher in the convent school and now wanted her freedom. But the poor, asserts the author, are des-

tined to remain poor unless there is a drastic social revolution within society. Their dreams must remain dreams until the time that society itself will no longer be bound by its self-imposed restrictions of class, wealth, and sex. In this context, it is certainly not coincidental that five of the characters in the novel are victims of social, material, political, and religious conflicts. They all begin their relationships to life in Beirut in one car at the beginning of the novel and travel together towards their unfortunate, yet predictable, destinies. Beirut thus becomes a symbol of discrimination, class struggle, and practically every other problem in human experience. In this sense, Ghālī Shukrī considers this novel to be a great novel, full of visionary narrative indicating what actually took place in 1975 during the civil strife in Lebanon.²² The "pot" of Beirut was boiling with highly explosive ingredients for some time, and when it did finally reach the boiling point and explode, al-Sammān had already predicted almost every single cause for the disaster.

Each one of the five parts of the novel can stand on its own merits, but together, they become one single novel which portrays and explains to a great extent the life and atmosphere not only of Beirut but of the Middle

East in general during the 1970's.

Al-Sammān is successful in choosing her characters as personifications of an individual characteristic in a social situation. Ghālī Shukrī claims that al-Sammān borrows from Shakespeare's Macbeth at the beginning of the novel.²³ The three veiled women who sit in the back seat of the car on its way to Beirut are, in this context, similar to the three witches in Macbeth--the voice of prophecy which communicates without words but only through mourning and weeping. As soon as they reach the Lebanese-Syrian border, these characters mysteriously disappear as if they have already completed their mission. Yāsāmīnah's illusion of their going to a funeral of one of their relatives is not true, however, as they do not reach Beirut at all, although Farah's worst fears are confirmed as he thinks that they are going to his funeral, the masters of fate escorting him and crying over him.

Ghālī Shukrī compares al-Sammān to Zarqā' al-Yamāmāh who had the capacity to see from far away.²⁴ In this sense, Farah's ability to see Beirut from far away is very indicative of al-Sammān's ability to place things in perspective and give the reader a clear picture of what is to come.

Al-Sammān's novel is comprised of contrasts from

beginning to end. She contrasts dreams and reality, life and death, all of which she uses to foreshadow the events and destinies of the characters as they develop in the novel. The dreams of the characters all lead each of them into different kinds of death, be it psychological, spiritual, or physical. Yāsāmīnah, for instance, undergoes a dual death once she indulges in sexual gratification and neglects her poetic talents. And she is of course faced with physical death (murder) at the hands of her brother. While Yāsāmīnah's dream becomes a reality, Farah struggles to achieve the same. Once he transforms the dream to reality, however, he finds that he has lost his manhood.

In general terms, al-Sammān in Bayrūt 75 deals with the treatment of three distinct issues: politics, sex, and death. These three issues are interconnected throughout the novel and she skilfully balances all three of them in her characterizations and settings for the action of the novel. On this point, we witness how her political commentary is presented through glimpses of the social and sexual events in which the characters participate and her descriptions of the environment in which they take place. What is not clear, however, is a specific political ideology; al-Sammān allows us glimpses and insights, but there is no real unification of these ideas.

Al-Sammān also makes the reader aware of time and place in her novel. She chooses Beirut as the stage for her characters simply because Beirut resembles any other city in the world. But Ghāli Shukrī considers Beirut a microcosm in macrocosm, and the journey to Beirut might have originated not only from Damascus but from anywhere else in the world. It is the "unpardonable sin" which appears in old legends.²⁵ 'Afīf Farrāj, on the other hand, sees Beirut as the focal point and the "stone forest" in which the characters gather and later disperse throughout the world.²⁶ It is also to be remembered here that throughout the realistic events of Bayrūt 75, al-Sammān tries to alert the reader to every single conflict not only in Beirut, but throughout the Arab world. She is very careful to select issues and events pertaining to these conflicts and after the composition of her realistic narrative, the reader cannot but notice a growing influence on al-Sammān by the Western literary masters like George Eliot, Thomas Hardy, Gorky, and Flaubert.

Al-Sammān is also very successful in her technique of writing. She moves in her novel from narration to dialogue and from dialogue to monologue. She is also successful in her use of the "Stream of consciousness" method of plot and character development in her writing

as well as the use of dramatic soliloquies on the part of her characters. Her choice of characters is, in itself, very significant, and out of that choice, the reader is able to accept the lives and experiences of the characters, most of whom are representative of the lower class and the petite bourgeoisie.

NOTES

¹Al-Sammān, Bayrūt 75, p. 47.

²Ibid., p. 50.

³Ibid., pp. 39-40.

⁴Ibid., p. 40.

⁵Ibid., p. 51.

⁶Ibid., pp. 52-3.

⁷See Rafīf Fattūh, Lā Shay' Yuhimmunī (Beirut: Manshūrāt al-Maktab al-Tijārī li-al-Ṭibā'ah wa al-Nashr wa al-Tawzī', 1971), pp. 50, 106. See also Nawāl al-Sa'dāwī, Imra'atān fī Imra'ah (Jerusalem: Manshūrāt Ṣalāh al-Dīn, 1976), pp. 64, 115, 162; idem, Imra'ah 'ind Nuqtat al-Ṣifr (Jerusalem: Manshūrāt Ṣalāh al-Dīn, 1979), pp. 10, 84, 95, 96, 99, 100, 101, 102, 110; 'Alyā' al-Dālātī, Hāribah min al-Qadar (Beirut: Dār al-Masīrah, 1977), pp. 143, 146, 164, 190, 211; Khanātah Banūnah, "Rabbi Innī Waḍa'tuhā Unthā," Liyasquṭ al-Ṣamt (al-Dār al-Bayḍā': Dār al-Kitāb, 1967), pp. 84-92; Laylā Ba'albakī, Anā Ahyā, pp. 310-17; Laylā 'Usayrān, al-Ḥiwār al-Akhras (Beirut: Dār al-Ṭalī'ah, 1963), pp. 115-6; Andrée Tarabayh, Ẓam'ānah fī Wāḥah (Beirut: Maktabat al-Ma'ārif, 1973), pp. 156-8.

⁸In the Qur'ān, we find specific detailed rules concerning women's rights and duties. In Sūrat al-Nisā' (Sūrah IV), verse 34, we find in particular one verse: "al-rijāl qawwāmūn 'alā al-nisā'" (men are set over women).

Among the many interpretations of this verse, that of Yūsuf 'Alī reads: "Men are the protectors of women." He then explains that the word "gawwām" can be interpreted as "the one who stands firm in another's business, protects his interests, and looks after his affairs; or it may be standing firm in his own business, managing affairs with a steady purpose." A. Yūsuf 'Alī, The Holy Qur'an (United States: McGregor & Werner, Inc., 1946), p. 90. On this same point, however, Muhammad Marmaduke Pickthall simply translates this verse as "Men are in charge of women." M.M. Pickthall, The Meaning of the Glorious Qur'an (New York City: Muslim World League, 1977), p. 80. This verse was used by Arab men for their own advantage. Again, it is a question of advantageous interpretation by the one who has most power.

⁹Al-Sammān, Bayrūt 75, p. 41.

¹⁰Ibid., p. 88.

¹¹Ibid., p. 40.

¹²Ibid., pp. 76-7.

¹³Ibid., p. 78.

¹⁴Ibid., p. 79.

¹⁵Ibid., p. 90.

¹⁶Ibid., p. 56.

¹⁷Ibid., p. 55.

¹⁸Ibid., p. 58.

¹⁹Ibid., p. 46.

²⁰Ibid., p. 67.

²¹Ibid., p. 61.

²²Shukrī, Ghādah al-Sammān, p. 121.

²³Ibid., p. 88-9.

²⁴Ibid., p. 121.

²⁵Ibid., p. 83.

²⁶Farrāj, al-Hurriyah, p. 108.

CONCLUSION

It is difficult to try to make some comprehensive concluding statements about this study of al-Sammān's work without resorting to generalizations. Be that as it may, one comes away from the study with a feeling that one has experienced a certain maturity, just as al-Sammān's works have progressed and matured since she first embarked on her literary career. The purpose of this study has been to examine the thematic content of al-Sammān's works, which fall into two stages: the first being before the Arab defeat of 1967, and the second after it.

Her works in the first stage concentrate on the nature of love and death, religion and sex, the oppression of women in Arab society, East-West cultural differences, and class consciousness. Her first publication in fact centered almost entirely on love, sex, and the inferiority and suppression of Arab women in male-female relationship. This fact led many to believe that she was merely another female author treating "women's issues". Her later publications in this stage, however, indicate that she could not be classified in such a category. Her publications in the second stage further indicate her development in terms of her own personal experience, literary skill and subject

matter.

Al-Sammān focuses clearly in her later period on the defeat itself--its causes, results, and the lessons drawn from it--and exposes the relationship of authorities with the general media. Other issues such as: the social structure of Arab society, religion, love of the homeland, the civil strife, and ultimately, the Civil War in Lebanon are also treated. Although the pre-defeat themes are still dealt with in this period, al-Sammān perceived love, the status of woman, sex, and class differences within the larger context of Arab society as a whole.

It can be said that her maturity and experience of the 1967 defeat led to a change in her perception of the issues, forcing her to relate women's problems to individual corruption and other destructive elements within the Arab social structure.

In her early period, it is obvious that al-Sammān was heavily influenced by both English and French literature and specially the existentialism of Sartre, Camus and others. Here she focuses on woman as an outsider, a stranger in a foreign land suffering from lack of freedom and experiencing social and political isolation, pessimism and human discrimination. Al-Sammān also makes several contrasts between the Eastern and the Western societies in

which she rather superficially describes the former as emotional, spiritual, moralistic and family-oriented, while she paints the latter as cold, immoral, unemotional and materialistic. On this point, I find that the author has fallen into the same pattern as many other Arab individuals in that she remains open-minded within a specific set of issues, but once these issues are removed from the foreground, the perception of reality changes drastically, especially visions of reality concerned with other cultures, other groups, other philosophies, and so on.

Al-Sammān's call for women's liberation during this early period is not well-defined. It appears throughout her fiction as fragmented emotional events enacted by her heroines. This vociferous concentration on the theme of the inferiority and the inequality of Arab women in relation to Arab men is due to the inexperience of the young writer who is overwhelmed by the tremendous pressures and disadvantages under which the Arab woman lives. However, if al-Sammān's fiction of the early period is limited to women's problems, her journalistic essays which began to appear after 1967 indicate a new development in her thought. The following quotation is a reflection of the writer's maturity and is a clear indication of how much broader her views and opinions have become:

But now the conflict needs a new look that will take it out of its metaphysical state and give it an Arab social, historical, and class perspective which will be clearer and more honest. The salvation of the modern Arab woman is not in declaring an outright disobedience of the man, nor is it in rejecting housework and child-bearing. The Arab man himself is not the oppressor of woman as much as he is the victim of the wrong social setting and class in our country.¹

Al-Samman continues in the same vein:

The Arab woman suffers from economic, intellectual, and sexual deprivation. But who says that the Arab man is free? Here I believe that this period requires women's struggle for their own liberation as well as the liberation of every Arab individual against all powers of deprivation. It is impossible for any woman or man to be free in a suppressed society which has lost its liberty.²

Al-Samman concludes by saying:

The conflict of the Arab woman is the same as the conflict of the revolutionary Arab man. . . . It is not man only who has suppressed the woman but it is the colonizer, backwardness and class structure which have suppressed both man and woman, and it is important to begin a mature unification of both against their real enemy.³

The above quotations, taken from her most recent non-fiction works, indicate the intellectual and experi-

ential growth of al-Sammān since her strident demands for the Arab woman's liberation of her early works. Such growth can also be very easily seen in her fiction." For an example of this, let us compare the following two passages:

I must crawl into the little cracks in the walls.
I must hide my ugly face every time darkness destroys the light of a passing car. I am a weak woman still possessed by a desire for a man who is not frightened of my ugliness, a man who sees me as a human being capable of suffering and dreaming. I am close to exploding and being torn to pieces. The ferocious worms of tragedy will lick my bleeding wounds hungrily.⁴

"Beirut did not ruin you. You all reproach Beirut, but the seeds of ruin are inside you. All Beirut has done was to bring them out in the open and give them a place to grow."

"But I am not a prostitute. I love you, and in the beginning of our relationship you always mentioned marriage."

"Marriage? You fool. Do you believe that I can marry a woman who gave herself to me before marriage?"

"Why not? Didn't you proudly tell me that you advised your father to list equality and liberation of women among his priorities when he ran for election?"

He did not answer, but muttered: "Would I marry a

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He did not answer, but muttered: "Would I marry a

woman I slept with before marriage and before the wedding night?"⁵

The first excerpt is taken from "al-Hāwiyah" (The Chasm), a short story in the collection entitled 'Aynak Qadari', al-Sammān's earliest publication. The woman represented in this passage is typical of the author's earlier works in that she is an estranged character who is torn apart by her own emotions. She is indeed a woman who cares about her appearance but who also demands equality and justice for herself as an individual, even though she perceives herself as succumbing to a man who will give her a real identity. The second passage from a later book, Bayrūt 75 is a less emotional and a less graphic illustration of the same points. Although the heroine is still demanding that she be married, the elements of the traditional male attitude and society's double standard are brought into play here. This second passage emphasizes that social attitudes cannot be changed by social legislation. Note how the man remains noticeably silent when she reminds him that he had urged his father to support liberal legislation. The whole tone, descriptive technique, characterization and content of the second passage represent the gradual maturation of al-Sammān's perception of the

problems of women within Arab society. If one can measure such things, this passage can be said to be just over half-way between the first passage and that quoted previously from al-A'māl ghayr al-Kāmilah: Šuffārat Indhār Dākhil Ra'sī.

Al-Sammān's message to the Arab woman at the present time is explicit: she wants her to redefine her role in society and to strive for equality based on social justice. The writer's views on marriage are realistic and pragmatic; she perceives marriage as a male-female co-existence based on mutual respect and equal opportunity for both partners to grow and work together.

The 1967 defeat affected al-Sammān's perception of other issues in addition to women's issues. She began to analyze the Arab conflict and tried to understand it in broader, more intellectual terms rather than purely emotionally. With a remarkable objectivity, al-Sammān has portrayed an accurate and unprejudiced picture of the gap between the upper classes and the masses in Arab countries. She has pointed out many contradictions existing in those countries and shown the lack of freedom and of social justice in everyday Arab life. The writer has criticized the leaders of the Arab world, accused them of a multiplicity of crimes committed against ordinary people and

blamed them for the catastrophes that resulted from the 1967 war and the 1975 Lebanese Civil War. She has also focused on the exploitation of the poor in the lower class of Arab society by the rich in the upper echelons.

In several of her works, al-Sammān has urged the Arab masses to rid themselves of their ancient customs and traditions that limit their progress towards establishing an egalitarian society. At times, however, she appears to be sympathetic to the elite in her society, but most of the time she has favoured the underdog.

Al-Sammān also calls on the Arab individual to revitalize his own resources and create a new environment to live in. Despite her belief in a total revolution with special emphasis on sexual revolution, al-Sammān does not have a specific manifesto for this revolution. Nor does she give the artist an explicit role in it. She herself does not belong to a political party, nor does she favour any. She believes that Arab factionalism serves as an element of division rather than unity. She reasserts her Arab nationalism and calls for Arab unity regardless of religion, colour, or sex. Surely, this is a mature and positive stand towards the attainment of Lebanese unity and a brighter Arab future.

Another major topic of al-Sammān's works is Beirut,

a location which appears numerous times in both her earlier and later works, and is in three of her book titles. Al-Sammān recognizes Beirut for its history and location. It is a city which has played a very important role in history. Its location on the eastern side of the Mediterranean has made it a link between East and West. It appears in al-Sammān's writings and in those of many other Arab writers as the city that contains a multitude of cultural, religious and ideological contradictions. It is, furthermore, a city responsible for many of the ills and some of the well-being of the other Arab cities. Beirut is, in al-Sammān's estimation, a microcosm of the Arab world. On the inside, this microcosm contains all the political, religious, social, economic, cultural, and psychological ills which plague the Arabs. Beirut is the city where the East and the West clash, the city where social injustice dominates, the city of diverse classes, receptive to all sorts of controversies. Beirut is the city of industrialism and pollution, the city of Eastern traditions and stagnation. Above all else, it is the mirror of the past and the future in which the Arab world will always be able to see its own face clearly.

As we have attempted to illustrate in this study, al-Sammān's characterization in her fictional works is

structured and well-defined. The lack of development of some of her characters, however, is quite deliberate in that her portrayal of them represents their limited perspective and personality. As with the themes of her stories, the characters in her earlier works are very different from those in her later works. In the pre-1967 works, her characters are limited by personal experience in that they do not seem to know what motivates them to understand a given experience. The world of these early characters is limited to drugs, alcohol, nightlife, and sex; the vision, then, is quite dim and blurred.

One of the most curious elements in al-Sammān's earlier characters, however, is the estrangement of the female characters from their environment. They are a product of Eastern society, yet they do not belong to it. It must be remembered on this point that al-Sammān believes that this estrangement is a part of the Arab women's nature in particular, and the Arab individual in general.⁶ The reality of these early heroines is tied to the reality of the Arab man. Whatever the heroine does must be identified or at least approved by the man; otherwise, it ends in failure. These characters seem to suffer from one oppression--and one oppression only--that of men.

The conflict between women and men, and specifi-

cally the conflict of inferiority and superiority, of equality and inequality, overshadow most of al-Sammān's writings of the pre-1967 period. This somewhat limited and superficial characterization is also exhibited when al-Sammān compares East and West--both people and places.

The element of style in al-Sammān's works also differs from one period to the next. A romantic writer in her earlier fiction, al-Sammān became a realist in her later fiction. It can be said that the reality of the 1967 defeat and the 1975 Lebanese civil strife was so intense that al-Sammān could not help but allow realism to be a dominant element in her writing in later years. However, even in her romantic writings, especially the love scenes in her fiction, al-Sammān is not the traditional romantic Arab writer, nor does she resemble any of her predecessors; she goes further than any of her contemporaries.

Al-Sammān's experience is that of a writer who looks at life in depth and sees it realistically, without discounting the imaginative and creative touches which enrich that experience. As a journalist, al-Sammān published numerous articles and essays written after first-hand, personal involvement. Always in search of new insights and experiences, she even tried drugs (LSD), visited

mental patients in psychiatric hospitals, and ventured into other investigations in different parts of Lebanese society. Many of her personal experiences are described in her fiction. While one cannot truthfully state that any particular story is autobiographical, it is clear that her practical experience and her own belief and perception are part of much of her work.

Al-Sammān's knowledge of Western and Eastern literature is wide and her faith in man is unshakable. As a close observer, I find that al-Sammān is forever trying to renew her style, although it is difficult at times to differentiate between poetry and prose in her writing, especially in her books Ḥubb, A'lantu 'alayk al-Ḥubb, and I'tiqāl Lahṣah Ḥāribah. She also relies on the unusual and fantastic in her phraseology, such as: 'Ayn. Ghayn. Tatafarras fī al-Būm ('Ayn. Ghayn. [two letters of the Arabic alphabet.] Scrutinizing the Owl). I'tiqāl Khu-rāfah (Capturing a Legend), and Ṣuffārat Indhār dākhil Ra'sī (A Warning Siren inside My Head). And like her Western mentors T.S. Eliot, Pound and Joyce, al-Sammān uses the metaphorical, symbolic, confessional stream of conscience, as well as the realistic techniques. Although she cannot be said to have mastered all of the above skills, one does not expect miracles, and al-Sammān should be commended

for her experimentation.

In her experimentation, however, al-Sammān does fall into the trap of repetition and padding, and does not seem to be able to avoid contradictions. Further, she fails to keep the novel at the same level of intensity from beginning to end. Despite her attempt to treat Arab society realistically and in depth, her realism at times is not as sharp as one would expect, and this is perhaps because her writing is overcrowded with existentialist elements. In other words, these existentialist elements throughout her fiction do not help the flow of the artistic expression. One aspect of her style also is the use of symbols to express or emphasize her points. Although they do vary from novel to novel and from story to story, we often find that she uses the same symbol in two or three different works, with only minor changes.

At times, however, al-Sammān falters in her expression and the flow subsequently appears flat in some places and brilliant in others.

Reference must be made at this point to the integrity and courage that al-Sammān has demonstrated in all of her works, both before and after 1967. Here is a writer who lives within the tempest which is sweeping the Arab world from one end to the other. Yet, she is still able

to write about the sickness that ails the Arab individual and his society with much sincerity and without fear.

I feel that al-Sammān's most significant contribution to modern Arabic literature is the transmission of a sense of urgency with regard to social reform, using existential personal experience with sincere dedication to truth.

Al-Sammān has made Arabs aware of some of the most controversial issues regarding human behaviour. She has also become an Arab exponent of such controversial ideas as social equality, women's liberation, and sexual freedom, as well as love of the homeland. Her forceful writings and their sensitive awareness and understanding of socio-political ills afflicting so many Arab countries have not failed to leave their imprint on the minds of many Arabs. Al-Sammān's unique ability to convey her message with eloquence and candor has put her in a prestigious position among her literary contemporaries. Having said this, however, we must also be mindful that, as al-Sammān has stated so often herself, all human works are in a sense incomplete, and so we can hopefully expect much more yet from this writer.

NOTES

¹Al-Sammān, "al-Maṭlūb Taḥrīr al-Mar'ah min al-Taḥarrur," al-A'māl ghayr al-Kāmilah: Ṣuffārat Indhār dākhl Ra'sī (Beirut: Manshūrāt Ghādah al-Sammān, 1980), p. 83.

²Ibid. This same view appears in George Ṭarābīshī's article "al-Istilāb fī al-Riwāyah al-Nisā'iyah," al-Ādāb 11 (March, 1963), 48.

³Al-Sammān, "al-Maṭlūb," al-A'māl: Ṣuffārat, p. 83. For the same view see also ibid., "Nisā' am Qāṭalah," pp. 80-3; "Lubnān fī al-Ḥarb," pp. 77-9; "Nurīd Naṣrah 'Arabīyah Jadīdah li-Qaḍāyā al-Jins," pp. 226-32.

⁴Idem., 'Aynāk Qadarī, p. 140.

⁵Idem., Bayrūt 75, p. 52.

⁶Yāsīn and Sulaymān, "Ghādah al-Sammān," al-Ādāb, p. 69; Shukrī, "Prologue," Ghādah al-Sammān, pp. 20-44; Muḥyī al-Dīn Ṣubḥī, "Ma'a Ghādah al-Sammān: Fī al-Qiṣṣah wa al-Ghurbah," Muṭārāḥāt, pp. 148-64; see also Ṭalāl Ḥarb, "al-Baṭal al-Riwā'ī fī al-Sharq wa al-Gharb," al-Ādāb 28 (September/October, 1980), 16-26. See also her interview in al-Sha'b entitled "al-Ḥibr Azraq: Hādha Huwa Lawn al-Kalimah fī Bayrūt" (10 November, 1977), 3, and "Naḥnu Na'īsh Zaman al-Khiyānah wa al-Sumuww," (16 December, 1980), 3.

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