

## Probing Saudi Arabia's Literary Complexity: Combining Global and Local Narratives for a Hybrid National Literature

Ali M. Alshhre<sup>1</sup>  
King Khalid University, Abha, Saudi Arabia

### Abstract

The article highlights the crucial need to balance Western and Saudi cultural themes in literature, specifically by incorporating the Saudi cultural heritage in a well-balanced manner. To explore this issue further, the article examines the impact of translated European literature on two influential Saudi female writers – Badriyyah al-Bishr and Raja Alem – and how they integrate Occidental literary themes into their works. It aims to explore the process of hybridisation by addressing three key points: the entry of world literature into Saudi Arabia, female writers' employment of diverse themes from translated works, and the positive or negative consequences of this hybridisation. It will also propose solutions to mitigate possible negative effects. To assess the extent of this influence, a brief analysis of Al-Bishr's *Hend and the Soldiers* and Alem's *The Dove's Necklace* is necessary to examine the impact of European literature on their works. The study highlights the potential of Saudi Arabian writers, particularly female ones, to serve as a medium for embedding and transferring "original themes" not only to Saudi Arabian audiences but also to Arab and international audiences. Despite the limited research on this subject in both Arabic and English, the study emphasises the critical importance of maintaining a well-balanced depiction of cultural elements in literature to preserve the unique cultural identity of Saudi Arabian national literature. The article suggests a balanced approach to incorporating themes from other cultures into Saudi literature, making them accessible to a wider audience, instead of criticising their adoption.

### Keywords

Hybridisation; Saudi literature; world literature; western themes; transnational visibility

---

<sup>1</sup> Ali Alshhre is Assistant Professor of Comparative Literature at King Khalid University, Abha, Saudi Arabia. A Ph.D. in Comparative Literature from Binghamton University (USA), he teaches courses on world and comparative literature. His research focuses on world literature in literary texts as well as in video games. Email: ashehre@kku.edu.sa; ORCID ID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-4907-8979>

## Introduction

Since its inception into academia following Johann von Goethe's coining of the term, world literature has undergone significant development. Therefore, a historical look at Goethe is essential. He is one of the most influential figures in world literature, known for his contributions to various literary genres, including poetry, drama, and the novel. His work, *Faust*, is considered a masterpiece of German literature and has been widely translated into numerous languages. Goethe's emphasis on the subjective experience of the individual and the importance of imagination has been a significant influence on the Romantic movement in literature. His scientific contributions were also highly respected during his lifetime and have continued to influence the field of biology. Goethe's legacy as a writer, scientist, and thinker continues to inspire and influence writers and scholars today. Overall, Goethe's impact on world literature cannot be overstated. His works have been read and admired for centuries, and his ideas on individualism, imagination, and creativity have had a lasting impact on literature and culture.

Theoretical contributions from scholars such as David Damrosch and Gisèle Sapiro have generated an increased interest in the study of world literature and its ideological approaches. Generally, world literature refers to literary works that have been successfully introduced to different cultures through translation. In Saudi Arabia, for example, various European literary collections by renowned authors such as Charles Dickens (1812–70), William Shakespeare (1564–1616), Fyodor Dostoevsky (1821–81), and Leo Tolstoy (1828–1910) have been translated into Arabic, with the number of Arabic translations of European literary texts steadily increasing in the Arab world, particularly in Saudi Arabia, in the 21st century. Fadi Jaber's historical survey of translations from the advent of Islam in the 7th century through the early 21st century reveals the region's dynamic flow of works translated into Arabic (128), particularly during modern times. International translation programmes were reinforced in the Arab world after the Second World War, with the implementation and questioning of the idea of "Arabisation" (131-132). As a result, translation has become a critical element in the cultures of Arab countries.

The availability of translated literary works from various nations, including Saudi Arabia, is on the rise, with core and peripheral writings becoming accessible worldwide. This trend has led to an increase in Saudi female writers' exposure to these translations, potentially impacting Saudi national literature. The main question addressed in this article is whether Saudi national literature has undergone or is on the verge of undergoing hybridisation. Hybridisation, in this context, refers to the breakdown of original cultural elements of literature, resulting in the incorporation of westernised themes borrowed from foreign works by Saudi writers into their literary creations.

This article examines the impact of translated European literature on two influential Saudi female writers, Badriyyah al-Bishr and Raja Alem, as its main data. It conducts a brief analysis of Al-Bishr's *Hend and the Soldiers* and Alem's *The Dove's Necklace* to explore the influence of European literature on their works. The employed methodologies encompass an examination of hybridisation through three pivotal aspects: the introduction of global literature to Saudi Arabia, the ways in which female authors integrated diverse themes from translated texts, and the positive or negative repercussions of this hybridisation, coupled with potential remedies for minimising adverse impacts. This research accentuates the capabilities of Saudi Arabian writers, particularly women, to function as a conduit for infusing and disseminating "original themes" to not only Saudi Arabian readers, but also to Arab and global audiences. This article's structure underscores the crucial need for sustaining an equilibrium in representing cultural aspects in literature, thereby preserving the distinct cultural identity of Saudi Arabian national literature. It advocates for a fair and judicious strategy for assimilating themes from diverse cultures into Saudi literature, making them available to a broader readership, rather than condemning their inclusion.

The following points are essential in substantiating the argument concerning the significance of global literary works. These points may pose a challenge to the canon of world literature and the ideology of broadening the scope of global development, particularly with regard to literary works from the periphery. Furthermore, this paper may also shed light on the critique of Saudi national literature and the effectiveness of introducing world literature into Saudi Arabia. The study aims to explore the strength of the correlation between world literature and Saudi literature in terms of influence and adaptation. It also proposes the adoption of acceptable and reasonable themes from Arabic translations of world literature works for use in Saudi literary works.

As the argument is centred around the works of two authors, al-Bishr and Alem, specifically their works *Hend and the Soldiers* and *The Dove's Necklace* respectively, it would be beneficial to provide a brief introduction to both the authors and their works. Born in Riyadh in 1967, Badriyyah al-Bishr obtained her undergraduate and master's degrees from King Saud University before earning a doctorate in Philosophy of Arts and Sociology from the Lebanese University in 2005. Later, she worked as Assistant Professor at Al-Jazeera University in Dubai for a brief period before joining Al-Yamama and Al-Hayat magazines. At these publications, she wrote weekly columns and was nominated for the prize of the best magazine column – under the name "Badryah El-Bishr" ("Badryah El-Bishr," [www.arabicfiction.org](http://www.arabicfiction.org)) – at the Arabic Press Awards in 2011. She has authored works such as *Hend and the Soldiers* (2005), *The Seesaw* (2010), and *Love Stories on al-Asha Street* (2013), as well as three short stories, all of which reflect

her perspective on the integration of female figures as characters in novels and other forms of Saudi literature.

Al-Bishr has been vocal and critical on various social issues in Saudi Arabia, such as women's freedom and equality with men. As a presenter of educational productions on MBC Channel, she expresses her views and encourages other Saudi women to be more visible and courageous, thereby serving as a gateway and tool for promoting a modern perspective away from patriarchal laws and their consequences. Her modern vision has gained popularity in Saudi society, with numerous well-known writers supporting her ideological critical approach. Furthermore, al-Bishr's literary career has led her to read more of European works, from which she borrowed themes to integrate into her own writing. Her integration of these themes is significant in introducing a new perspective to Saudi literature, especially in terms of incorporating Western literary elements.

Born in 1963 in Makkah, Alem is a prominent Saudi Arabian playwright, novelist, and short story writer (Ashur, eds. 351). She studied English literature at King Abdulaziz University and graduated in 1983 with a bachelor's degree. Her training in English literature exposed her to numerous English literary works, which helped broaden her knowledge of English culture and history, inspiring her to write her own works (Ashur, eds. 351). Among her published works are *Four/Zero* (novel), *The Final Death of the Actor* (theatre play), *Dancing on the Tip of the Thorn* (play), *The Silk Road* (novel), *Holes in the Back* (play), *River of Animals* (short stories), and *My Thousand and One Nights* (novel). These were published between 1987 and 1998 by various publishers in Beirut, Jeddah, and Casablanca (Ashur, eds. 351). Therefore, Alem represents a reflection of Makkan literature that refers to the literary works produced by writers from or inspired by the city of Makkah, Saudi Arabia. It is a significant city for Muslims worldwide and has a rich history and culture. Makkan literature includes poetry, fiction, non-fiction, and religious works, among others, and often explores themes related to Islam, pilgrimage, and the city's social and cultural dynamics. For her literary achievements and imaginative creativity, she has received an honorary prize from the Spanish Arab Institute at the Ibn Tufayl competition of 1985, which raised her popularity in the Arab world and led readers and scholars to take an interest in her literature, particularly regarding Arabia and the al-Hejaz region (Ashur, eds. 351).

In *Hend and the Soldiers*, Hend is a young Saudi woman, who is forced into an arranged marriage with an army officer, which quickly proves to be unsuccessful. Her father, who is also a sergeant, imprisons her within the community of soldiers in an attempt to protect her and fight for her independence. Hend grows up feeling oppressed by her mother's strict nature and the country's societal norms, which restrict women's freedom and emotions. Despite the limitations placed on her, Hend finds solace in writing stories that

depict women's struggles for independence and freedom of choice. She becomes more resistant to societal pressure and becomes determined to pursue her dreams and aspirations. As she continues to write and express herself, Hend begins to face opposition and criticism from those around her, who view her as a threat to traditional Saudi values. She also becomes entangled in a forbidden romance with a soldier, which further complicates her situation. Ultimately, Hend must navigate the challenging societal norms and expectations placed upon her while remaining true to herself and her desires for independence and freedom. The novel ends on a hopeful note, with Hend continuing to write and inspire others to fight for their own liberation.

In the Lane of Many Heads, an alley in contemporary Makkah, the discovery of a young woman's body, stripped naked, remains unclaimed due to the residents' shame. The investigation of the case by Detective Nasser involves the participation of numerous individuals from all over Makkah, including those residing in the Lane of Many Heads. This intriguing and enigmatic novel by Alem, the first woman to win the International Prize for Arabic Fiction, humorously and profanely depicts a fever dream. Initially, Nasser suspects the dead woman to be Aisha, one of the residents of the area, and attempts to uncover clues from her emails. Aisha portrays a world that encompasses everything from criminal activity and religious fanaticism to the exploitation of foreign laborers by a building contractor mafia, which is destroying the city's historical regions. In contrast, her love letters to her German lover exude beauty. Yusuf, Aisha's neighbour, also reveals his view of the city, becoming increasingly frustrated with the rapid pace of change. This novel is as thrilling as classic noir, as nuanced as a Nabokov novel, and as complex as the alleys of Makkah itself. It exposes the contradictions of a city and a civilisation, torn between harsh customs and hesitant acceptance of new traditions.

### **Translating world literature**

Translation is considered one of the essential elements of world literature. With the increasing popularity of translation studies in the 1970s, scholars from various fields have focused on the importance of translation as a tool for communication and learning. From a literary perspective, for a work to reach a wider global audience, it needs to be translated into foreign languages. Scholars such as Damrosch and Sapiro have emphasised the critical role of translation in the domain of world literature. According to Damrosch, world literature refers to literary works that have spread beyond their culture of origin, either through translation or in their original language. So, he argues that "the idea of world literature can usefully continue to mean a subset of the plenum of literature. I take world literature to encompass all literary works that circulate beyond their culture of origin, either in translation or in their original language" (Damrosch 4). He believes that a work enters the world literature canon through translation,

stating that “world literature [is] writing [that] gains in translation” (37). Susan Bassnett also stresses the power of translation, stating that it can make the inaccessible accessible (3). By transforming original works into different languages, translations act as windows through which many literary works can be read and shared globally (Bassnett 3). Translations are instrumental in making a work of literature worthy of entry into the world literature canon, as they allow the work to reach different readerships in different lands. Bassnett agrees with Damrosch in understanding the critical role translations play in making a specific work of literature worthy of entry in the world literature canon (3). Sapiro similarly argues that a work can maintain a “transnational visibility” through translations into other languages, like English, and that “such a visibility depends on the circulation of the work in other languages, that is to say in translated versions” (2). Translations allow literary works to cross borders and communicate the cultural perspectives of their source countries to readers around the world. In this sense, translations play an essential role in promoting cultural diversity and understanding among different communities. As a result, the translation of literary works should be encouraged and supported to facilitate the growth of world literature and cultural exchange.

According to Noorani, translations of literary works into Arabic have played a significant role in expanding the canon of world literature and introducing it to more Arab audiences (236). He suggests that the translation of various European literary works into Arabic demonstrates the crucial role that translation plays in reshaping the literary legacy of the Arab world within national and global contexts (236). In particular, Noorani cites Sulayman al-Bustani's translation of *Iliad* in 1904 and Ruhi al-Khalidi's book, *The History of the Science of Literature among the Europeans, the Arabs, and Victor Hugo*, also published in 1904, as examples of works that introduced Arabic literature to world literature with positive effects (236). The practice of translating foreign works into Arabic has continued to grow in recent decades. For instance, translations of William Shakespeare's *Macbeth* by Hussein Amin in 1994, *Romeo and Juliet* by Muhammad Anani in 1993, Dostoevsky's *Notes from Underground* by Ahmad al-Weezi in 2014, and Charles Dickens' *Oliver Twist* by Monir al-Baalbaki, first printed in 2007, have all contributed to this trend. Al-Baalbaki has earned the nickname “Master of Arab translators” due to his consistent efforts in translating foreign novels into Arabic.

In the realm of literature, translations of foreign works are a valuable contribution made by translators to disseminate works of world literature. The act of translation brings to light literary works from different cultures, making them visible to a wider audience. As a result, translators should be acknowledged and appreciated for their professional role in this process. For instance, Amin, Anani, al-Weezi, Baalbaki, and others facilitated the entrance of various national literary works into the Arab world. Meanwhile, Sanaa Abouzaid's article, “Arabic

Fiction in English Translation: A Translator-oriented perspective,” explores the experiences of five Western translators in translation theory and practice, who may have expectedly recommended key implications about the advantages of translating Arabic literature into English (330). These five translators are Johnson-Davies, Allen, Jacquemond, Davis, and Booth (Abouzaid 330). Despite Abouzaid’s conclusion that translation can be exploited to maintain “cultural hegemony and power structure” (331), it is still an effective tool that aims to share literary, social, political, and cultural information across the globe. Despite criticisms from some scholars, translation is indispensable to world literature, as it is considered a new field vital to interdisciplinary studies (Damrosch and Sapiro 2).

Throughout history, both the West and the East have utilised the impact of translation to disseminate their cultures and literature to one another. Johnson asserts that translations have enabled works of European literature, such as *Les Misérables*, to be circulated in Arabic, thereby influencing the development of the Arabic novel (1-2). Conversely, translations of Arabic literature have impacted the evolution of the European novel prior to this occurrence (Johnson 1-2). Although Johnson does not offer adequate commentary on how Arabic literature influenced European literature before the latter influenced Arabic literature, she delves further into the subject matter in her book *Stranger Fictions: A History of the Novel in Arabic Translation*, where she discusses how certain Arabic translators are perceived as “producers” of novels (5). Due to their literary translations of European creations, these translators were not only classified as translators but also as theorists whose translations positively influenced literary history and facilitated production “between languages, classifications of forms, and systems of literary value” (Johnson 5). Johnson’s book also prompts readers to investigate the historical journey of certain Arabic translators who published their productions in Beirut, Cairo, Malta, Paris, London, and New York. As Johnson explains, her book commences with the initial translations performed by Lebanese and Egyptian translators under the sponsorship of British missionary societies in Malta during the 1830s and culminates in “the first decade of the twentieth century with translations of British and French sentimental and crime novels published in Cairo” (Johnson 8). Consequently, Cairo has become a hub for many translated works, as its local literature opened the gates for these works to enter its canon.

Since the inception of translation studies, the benefits of translations in literature have been extensively discussed. One of the primary advantages of translation is that it acts as a gateway for multicultural and historical literary works to enter other regions. Secondly, translation facilitates cross-cultural communication and allows people to gain familiarity with new cultures and civilisations. For world literature, translation plays a pivotal role in establishing a complete canon, starting from the centre, and extending to the periphery.

Simultaneously, for peripheral works of world literature, translation can be a positive force in moving them towards the centre and establishing a critical cycle that reflects the essential nature of all world literature. For instance, Algahtani asserts that translation has facilitated the gradual but successful movement of Saudi Arabian national literature towards the centre of world literature, despite its initial classification as peripheral literature (26). This shift was made possible by the translation of several European works that are considered central to world literature. This newfound interest in Arab literature led to the recognition of Saudi Arabian female novelists, who have played a vital role in shaping modern Saudi literature (Algahtani 26). Both Arab and Western writers have taken notice of this transformation (Algahtani 26).

Another significant advantage of translation and world literature is its potential to promote cross-cultural understanding and empathy. Through translated literature, readers can explore and gain insight into different cultural perspectives, beliefs, and ways of life. As stated by Bassnett, "Translation is not just about language; it is also about culture, values and ways of seeing the world" (1). Similarly, Damrosch argues that "world literature offers a way of thinking beyond national or linguistic borders, allowing us to see the world from multiple perspectives and to understand our own particular cultural contexts in a broader context of human experience" (6). In this way, translation and world literature can foster greater intercultural dialogue and mutual understanding, ultimately promoting a more harmonious and interconnected global community.

Further, the article titled "Language, Translation, and Culture" written by Abbasi et al examines the relationships between language, translation, and culture. The authors explore the critical role of translation in transferring cultural concepts across different languages while identifying potential barriers and difficulties encountered by translators. The article emphasises the importance of understanding cultural factors and traditions in the translation process to ensure that translations accurately reflect the intended meaning of the source text. The authors also note the limitations of translation, including cultural and political censorship and variations in cultural norms and practices. It concludes that translation serves as a crucial and fundamental means of promoting cross-cultural understanding and communication, but that effective translations require a deep understanding of both the source and target languages and cultures.

### **Incorporating foreign elements in Saudi literature**

This section delves into the impact of European literature on Saudi Arabian writers, specifically the influence of translated European works on the writing of two prominent Saudi female writers, Badriyyah al-Bishr and Raja Alem. These writers have incorporated some Occidental literary themes into their works, which can be seen as an indication of the influence of Arabic translations of Western novels. The novel genre was relatively new to Saudi Arabian literature,



which was previously dominated by poetry. The introduction of the novel genre was influenced by the Western novel, and its impact on Saudi literature is discussed in this section of the article. The article also references Ibrahim Almarhaby's investigation of the role of Saudi women's fiction, which notes that poetry had been the dominant literary genre on the Arabian Peninsula for centuries, even before the foundation of the three Saudi states. Tribalism played a significant role in the dominance of poetry, and each Arab tribe had its own distinct poetic style (Almarhaby 49). The article seeks to explore how the incorporation of Western literary themes into Saudi literature reflects a shift in literary genre dominance and cultural influence. According to Almarhaby, the novel genre is relatively new to Arab culture, and Saudi Arabian writers were introduced to it through the works of other Arab writers, particularly those from Lebanon and Egypt (49). Therefore, the novel is considered a new genre in Saudi Arabian literature, and its origin can be traced back to the publication of 'Abdul-Quddūs al-Anṣārī's novel *al-Taw' amān* (translated as *The Twins*) published in 1930 (Almarhaby 49). Al-Anṣārī and his novel are both recognised as pioneers in the history of the Saudi Arabian novel by the literary community (Almarhaby 49).

The modern Saudi novel did not develop under the influence of Saudi poetry, but rather emerged as a result of the communication between Saudi literary figures and those in other Arab countries (quoted in Almarhaby 49-50). This development is believed to have taken place between 1924 and 1945, with the progress of national education and journalism, which provided a more open space for Saudis to interact (quoted in Almarhaby 49-50). Furthermore, the Saudi government began to offer scholarships for education abroad, and in 1927, several Saudi intellectuals, literary critics, and writers went to Egypt to study, gaining exposure to cultural elements that later impacted Saudi culture (quoted in Almarhaby 50). Although the Egyptian influence contributed to the creation of a Saudi literary and cultural scene, Saudi intellectuals later advocated for breaking free from this dominance (quoted in Almarhaby 50). Therefore, as Saudi Arabia continues to undergo rapid transformation, the novel genre has offered its writers a unique lens through which they could explore and critically engage with the changing dynamics of the country.

The exhortation to dismantle the cultural influence of Egypt on Saudi Arabia led to a contraction in national literature, akin to the dearth of female novelists in Saudi literature since the country's establishment in 1932 by King Abdulaziz. Thus, the literature produced during the interim period between then and 1990 was predominantly free of external influences. Nonetheless, the emergence of a few Saudi female writers, such as al-Bishr and Alem, after 1990 brought about a slight transformation by incorporating certain adopted motifs from diverse works of Occidental literature.

Although Al-Bishr and Alem do not explicitly mention which Western novels have influenced them, there are indications from various sources that they have been inspired by Western literature. Alharbi states that

such arguments among Arab critics and scholars about the first modern Arabic novel demonstrate the conflict between revivalists and neoclassicists over the replacement of classical Arabic literary forms with Western ones. Overall, Arab critics do not deny the western influence in shaping the modern Arab novel through translation. (4-5)

The article titled “Raja Alem & Mohammed Achaari at London Literature Festival” posted by Susannah Tarbush delves into the intricacies of a literary event in the heart of London, featuring the celebrated wordsmiths Raja Alem and Mohammed Achaari hailing from the esteemed lands of Saudi Arabia and Morocco, respectively. The event, which took place in 2011, was moderated by the Paul Blezard. The discourse revolved around the writers’ personal experiences of being Muslim writers in the West and their insightful views on a myriad of thought-provoking topics such as literature, politics, and identity. The article provides a sneak peek into the lively exchange of ideas between Alem and Achaari, featuring powerful quotes such as Achaari’s assertion on the unifying power of literature transcending cultural barriers and Alem’s profound reflection on writing as a vital tool for self-expression and rebellion. For example, Blezard asked Alem if she had more creative freedom compared to Western authors, who are limited by the strictures of the publishing industry. He suggested that Alem had a broad canvas to work with, unconstrained by niche publishing categories. In response, Raja humbly acknowledged her reliance on Western novels as a writing reference. She proudly considers herself a product of this storytelling legacy, skilfully marrying it with the Western approach to writing. As a writer from Saudi Arabia, she has effortlessly broken free from the shackles of limitations, confidently embracing her unique blend of literary influences. Further, the article “An Intersectional Feminist Reading of *The Dove’s Necklace* and *Hend and the Soldiers*” by Najlaa R. Aldeeb explores the intersectionality of feminism in the works of Raja Alem and Badryah al-Bishr. While the book discusses the themes of gender and power in both novels, it analyses the ways in which the two authors utilise their unique perspectives and literary traditions to convey not only feminist messages in their works, but also their employment of feminist themes in their works influenced by Western literatures.

The two works – *Hend and the Soldiers* and *The Dove’s Necklace* – of these two prominent Saudi figures, respectively, al-Bishr and Alem, have been implicitly influenced by Western literary works to which they were exposed through translation and their English literature majors. In her article titled “An Intersectional Feminist Reading of *The Dove’s Necklace* and *Hend and the Soldiers*,” Najlaa Aldeeb conducts an intersectional analysis of how these two authors portrayed feminism in their works. Feminism, a Western movement that has

been explored by various scholars such as Patricia Collins, Sara Ahmad, and María Lugones, among others, is also examined by Aldeeb. Furthermore, Aldeeb examines the techniques used by al-Bishr and Alem to engage Saudi female readers. Aldeeb states,

Dhahir [the translator of *The Dove's Necklace*] demonstrates how Alem's *The Dove's Necklace* is a homage to Mecca's heritage. She states that Alem applies techniques in writing that 'help overcome heritage erosion with creativity' (Dhahir 127) to enhance young Saudis' sense of history. Dhahir names the techniques as using female symbols like the Great Mother, legends such as that of Hajar—Abraham's second wife—interwoven characterization and symbolism. ("An Intersectional feminist Reading," 174)

So, Alem's skillful use of female figures as symbols, such as the Great Mother and Abraham's second wife, serves as a prime example of her success in reinforcing the heritage of Makkah. These figures carry significant historical weight and are thus influential for Saudi readers. Alem's conscious employment of such powerful symbols proves her exceptional talent in preserving the essence of Makkah's heritage.

In *Hend and the Soldiers*, al-Bishr has incorporated themes of female empowerment and independence, which were originally shaped through the feminist movements that emerged in the United States of America. According to Elizabeth Evans and Prudence Chamberlain, feminist waves have distinct identities, with the first wave primarily aiming to secure voting rights for women (399). The second wave, which emerged in the late 1960s, demanded more social and personal freedoms for women, including equal pay and reproductive rights (Evans & Chamberlain 399). The third wave focused on the inclusion of diverse women's experiences and their independence (Baumgardner & Richards 219). Therefore, a critical analysis of *Hend and the Soldiers* can shed light on how these themes were employed. The main protagonist, Hend, a divorced mother from Riyadh, struggled with the patriarchal system in Saudi Arabia since her childhood, which instilled in her a sense of fear and anger (al-Bishr 2). Through her character, al-Bishr highlights the challenges that women face in their pursuit of independence and empowerment. The usage of these feminist themes in al-Bishr's work is indicative of the impact of Western feminist thought on Saudi Arabian literature, particularly in the context of hybrid literature. For example, in Aldeeb's analysis of al-Bishr's *Hend and the Soldiers*, it is revealed that Hend's struggle with Saudi social norms is a central theme in the novel. She is constantly criticised for not adhering to societal expectations of a "good" mother. Her arranged marriage to an army officer fails, leading her father, who is a sergeant, to confine her in the community of soldiers, where she fights for her independence (Aldeeb, "The Voice of Silent Toxic Mothers" 12). As Hend grows older, she associates her oppression with her mother's strict upbringing and the

restrictive cultural norms in Saudi Arabia. Hend's mother, having grown up in a society where women's emotions were suppressed, also tries to mould her daughter to conform to this patriarchal system (Aldeeb, "The Voice of Silent Toxic Mothers" 12). Nevertheless, Hend resists these attempts by writing stories that depict women's struggles in their pursuit of independence and free choice.

In Alem's *The Dove's Necklace*, the themes of patriarchy and the depiction of women's bodies are prominently depicted. Alem intends to use Saudi literature to communicate her criticism of the patriarchal system by alluding to discriminatory social prejudices and stereotypical notions about women (Alem 15). The novel begins with a dead girl found in an alley in a poor area of Makkah called the Lane of Many Heads (Alem 15). The residents of this alley, who have struggled with living in this harsh environment, become strict with their wives and daughters (Alem 51). These struggles lead women to question their choices, whether to remain in this patriarchal environment or seek modernity, knowing that becoming a modern and independent individual in such a setting requires much time and sacrifice (Alem 51). When detective Nasser al-Qahtani comes to examine the dead naked body of the woman found on the Lane of Many Heads, he becomes obsessed with recomposing the disfigured body instead of identifying the killer and the reason behind the crime (Alem 15). From this perspective, the detective's character with his obsession with the female body is an embodiment of the patriarchal system that is harmful to women in Saudi Arabia with its obsession with women's bodies and nakedness. Another example of the representation of the system is when the character Um Sa'd is criticised by the residents of the Lane for having a well-built physique with strong shoulders and muscles, which they believe diminishes her femininity (Alem 117). In depicting such instances, Alem reveals her intentions to use her writing to criticise the patriarchal system. In conclusion, *The Dove's Necklace* is an insightful critique of the patriarchal system in Saudi Arabia through the depiction of women's bodies and the social prejudices and stereotypical notions that persist. By using the plot of a detective investigating a murder, Alem was able to depict the complexities of the system and how it harms women from her perspective. Alem's novel has contributed to the growth of hybrid literature in Saudi Arabia, incorporating themes of crime fiction, criticism of patriarchy, and the depiction of women's bodies, among others.

### **Hybridity and Saudi Arabian literature**

To better understand how Saudi Arabian literature has been influenced by hybridisation, it is essential to provide an explanation of the concept of "hybrid literature" from a historical point of view. Hybrid literature is a relatively new term that has emerged in literary studies in recent years. It refers to literary works that combine different cultural and literary traditions, genres, and styles, creating a unique and innovative literary form that transcends traditional literary

boundaries. Further, the term “hybrid literature” has been used by several scholars and literary critics over the years, and its origin is difficult to pinpoint to a single person or reference. However, it is worth noting that the concept of hybridity itself was first introduced by Homi K. Bhabha, an Indian-born postcolonial theorist, in his book, *The Location of Culture* (1994).

*The Location of Culture* explores the complex relationship between culture, power, and identity in the context of globalisation and colonialism. Bhabha argues that cultural identities are not fixed or static, but are constantly in flux and shaped by the dynamics of power and resistance. Bhabha’s key concept in the book is “hybridity,” which refers to the mixing and blending of different cultural traditions and practices. He argues that cultural hybridity can be a source of resistance and subversion against dominant cultural norms and structures. For example, in Chapter 4, “Of Mimicry and Man: The Ambivalence of Colonial Discourse,” Bhabha discusses the idea of “mimicry” as a form of hybridity that challenges and subverts colonial power structures (85-93). And in Chapter 8, “DissemiNation: Time, Narrative, and the Margins of the Modern Nation,” Bhabha explores the hybrid nature of narrative structures and literary forms, arguing that they can resist dominant cultural and political discourses (139-171).

Similarly, Marwan M. Kraidy in his book *Hybridity, or the Cultural Logic of Globalization* (2005) explores the concept of cultural hybridity in the context of globalisation. The author maintains that hybridity involves blending two forms, styles, or identities that were previously distinct, and that cross-cultural contact is necessary for this to happen (5). This contact often happens across national borders and cultural boundaries, and usually involves some sort of movement (Kraidy 5). In the case of international communication, this movement can include cultural commodities such as media programs, or the movement of people through migration (Kraidy 5). In addition, Mary Louise Pratt’s essay “Arts of the Contact Zone” (1991) explores the concept of the contact zone, which she defines as “social spaces where cultures meet, clash, and grapple with each other, often in contexts of highly asymmetrical relations of power” (34). Pratt argues that the contact zone is a site of cultural production, where new forms of hybrid culture and language emerge (34). She suggests that texts that arise from the contact zone are characterised by their hybridity, incorporating elements from different cultures and challenging dominant cultural narratives (37-38). Pratt’s essay has been influential in the study of hybrid literature and the ways in which cultural encounters shape literary production (33-40). However, from a literary standpoint, Damrosch argues that world literature is characterised by a hybridity that arises from the cross-fertilisation of different literary traditions. He suggests that this hybridity is a result of the movement of literary works across different cultures, and that it is a defining feature of world literature (43).

Borrowing Western themes in Saudi literature can have significant consequences that shape its hybridisation. The dominant themes of female

independence and criticism of patriarchy may overpower Saudi literature, resulting in a complete hybridisation of culture. The works of Saudi female authors such as al-Bishr, Alem, Alsanea, and al-Sharif, including Alem's *Sarab* (2018), Alsanea's *Girls of Riyadh* (2005), and al-Sharif's *Daring to Drive* (2017), are prime examples of literature that generate both positive and negative debates among both Saudi and international audiences. In fact, since 9/11, a new generation of Saudi novelists, particularly women authors, has begun to gain attention from readers and scholars in the Arab and Western worlds (Algahtani 26). Therefore, it is crucial to recognise the possible outcomes of incorporating Western literary elements and to ensure that the cultural genuineness of Saudi literature is preserved. The new generation of Saudi (women) novelists are more aware of their struggles and have expressed it more openly than their hesitant predecessors who avoided discussing social issues and gender inequality (qtd. in Algahtani 28). However, this shift towards Western themes, especially feminism, might result in a critical consequence – the hybridisation of Saudi literature where Western ideas dominate. This can lead to a lack of representation of historical Saudi cultural elements, which is an implicit and concerning consequence of this hybridisation. It is imperative to depict and employ these cultural elements in Saudi literature to maintain its genuineness and prevent it from becoming excessively hybridised, which may cause Saudi literary audiences to read about their culture only in their national literature.

Notwithstanding the aforementioned constraints, it is my studied observation that the act of appropriating themes from divergent literary traditions and cultures can yield manifold benefits. Borrowing literary themes from different cultures is a fundamental aspect of creating rich and diverse literature. In today's world, where cultures are increasingly intermingling and globalisation is on the rise, it is becoming more important than ever to acknowledge the significance of cultural exchange in literature. There are several reasons why borrowing literary themes from different cultures is essential.

Firstly, borrowing themes from different cultures can bring a fresh perspective to a particular story. By drawing on the values and experiences of different cultures, authors can add layers of complexity to their work, making it more engaging and thought-provoking. For example, Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's novel *Americanah* (2013) explores themes of identity and belonging from the perspective of a Nigerian woman living in the United States. Through her use of cultural references and experiences, Adichie creates a nuanced exploration of these themes that might not have been possible had she only drawn from her own culture. Secondly, borrowing literary themes from different cultures can help break down cultural barriers and foster understanding. Literature has the power to create empathy and understanding across cultures, and by incorporating themes from different cultures, authors can create bridges between different communities. Thirdly, borrowing literary themes from

different cultures can help preserve cultural heritage. By incorporating themes and elements from different cultures, authors can help keep traditions and cultural practices alive. Moreover, borrowing literary themes from different cultures can challenge stereotypes and promote diversity. By drawing on a wide range of cultural experiences, authors can create characters and stories that break down stereotypes and provide a more accurate and nuanced portrayal of different cultures. This can help promote diversity and encourage greater understanding and acceptance of different cultural groups.

### Conclusion

The captivating subject of the increasing influence of European literature on Saudi Arabian national literature, particularly in relation to female Saudi writers, is thoroughly explored in this article. The intricate process of hybridisation is dissected, with a strong recommendation for a just and unbiased approach to integrating foreign cultural themes. The article underlines the paramount importance of striking a harmonious balance in literature to preserve the essence of Saudi Arabian cultural identity. The potential for female Saudi Arabian writers to act as catalysts for disseminating “original themes” not just to local audiences but also to a wider Arab and global readership is highlighted. Therefore, it is crucial to address this matter with pragmatic solutions that curtail any negative effects on cultural identity while simultaneously making Saudi Arabian national literature more accessible to a diverse audience.

The article has embarked on the discussion of the influx of world literature into Saudi Arabia, how female writers employed an assortment of themes from translated works, and the repercussions of this hybridisation, both positive and negative, along with recommended solutions to counter any undesirable outcomes. For instance, the article touches on the use of themes such as patriarchy, female empowerment, and freedom, which reflect the feminist aspect of al-Bishr’s and Alem’s literary works. Overuse of these themes can potentially hybridise Saudi national literature. Therefore, this research advocates for a judicious implementation of these themes and any other borrowed themes in the works of Saudi literary writers.

### References

- Abouzaid, Sanaa. “Arabic Fiction in English Translation: A Translator-Oriented Perspective.” *madjalate-almayadine* 1.3 (2019): 330- 353.
- Adichie, Chimamanda Ngozi. *Americanah*. Anchor Books, 2014.
- Albeshr, Badriah. *Hend and the Soldiers*. University of Texas Press, 2017.
- Aldeeb, Najlaa R. “An Intersectional Feminist Reading of *The Dove’s Necklace* and *Hend and the Soldiers*.” *Memory, Voice, and Identity*. Routledge, 2021. 173-183.

- Aldeeb, Najlaa R. "The Voice of Silent Toxic Mothers in Morrison's *A Mercy* and Albeshr's *Hend and the Soldiers*." *International Journal of Linguistics, Literature and Translation* 5.1 (2022): 10-17.
- Aldeeb, Najlaa. "An Intersectional feminist Reading of *The Dove's Necklace* and *Hend and the Soldiers*." *Memory, Voice, and Identity: Muslim Women's Writing from across the Middle East*. Edited by Feroza Jussawalla and Doaa Omran. Routledge, 2021.
- Alem, Raja. *The Doves Necklace: A Novel*. Abrams, 2016.
- Algahtani, Noura. "Defying Convention: Saudi Women Writers and the Shift from Periphery to Centre." *Women's Studies International Forum* 59 (2016): 6-31.
- Alharbi, Ghazal Muhammed. *Contemporary Saudi Fiction in English Translations: A Bibliographic and Analytical Study of the Methodology of the English Translation of the Novel Jabilyah*. Indiana University, 2022.
- Almarhaby, Ibrahim KI. *A Thematic Investigation of Saudi Women's Fiction, 1958-2016*. The University of Manchester (United Kingdom), 2020.
- Ashour, Radwa, Ferial Ghazoul, and Hasna Reda-Mekdashy, eds. *Arab Women Writers: A Critical Reference Guide, 1873-1999*. Oxford University Press, 2008.
- "Badryah El- Bishr." *arabicfiction.org*, <https://www.arabicfiction.org/en/Badryah-El-Bishr>.
- Bassnett, Susan. "The Rocky Relationship between Translation Studies and World Literature." *Translation and World Literature*. E-book, edited by Susan Bassnett, Routledge, an imprint of the Taylor & Francis Group, 2019. pp. 1-14.
- Baumgardner, Jennifer, and Amy Richards. *Manifesta: Young Women, Feminism, and the Future*. Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2010.
- Bhabha, Homi K. *The Location of Culture*. Routledge, 1994.
- Damrosch, David. *What is World Literature?* Princeton University Press, 2003.
- Evans, Elisabeth, and Prudence Chamberlain. "Critical Waves: Exploring Feminist Identity, Discourse and Praxis in Western Feminism." *Social Movement Studies* 14.4 (2015): 396-409.
- Jaber, Fadi. "The Landscape of Translation Movement in the Arab world: From the 7th Century until the Beginning of the 21st Century." *Arab World English Journal (AWEJ)* 6.4 (2016): 128-140.
- Johnson, Rebecca C. *Stranger Fictions: A History of the Novel in Arabic Translation*. Cornell University Press, 2021.
- Kraidy, Marwan. *Hybridity, or the Cultural Logic of Globalisation*. Temple University Press, 2006.
- Noorani, Yaseen. "Translating World Literature into Arabic and Arabic into World Literature: Sulayman al-Bustani's al-Ilyadha and Ruhi al-Khalidi's Arabic Rendition of Victor Hugo." *Migrating Texts: Circulating Translations*



- around the Eastern Mediterranean*. E-book, edited by Marilyn Booth, Edinburgh University Press, 2019.
- Pratt, Mary Louise. "Arts of the Contact Zone." *Profession*, 1991, pp. 33–40. *JSTOR*, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/25595469>.
- Sapiro, Gisele. "The Role of Publishers in the Making of World Literature: The Case of Gallimard." *Letteratura e letteratura* [Literature and Arts]. E-book, Fabrisio Serra Editore, 2017. pp. 81-95.
- Susannah, Tarbush. "Raja Alem & Mohammed Achaari at London's Southbank Centre." *The Tanjara*, 11 July 2011, <http://thetanjara.blogspot.com/2011/07/raja-alem-mohammed-achaari-at-london.html>.