

Cultural Influences in Poet Nazar Qabbani's Experience: A Case Study of "My Story with Poetry"

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Abstract

The study aims to identify the cultural influences and sources in the poetic experience of Nizar Qabbani as described in his book *قصتي مع الشعر* "My Story with Poetry". It also discusses these influences and their mechanisms in his poetic texts especially that Qabbani's book serves as a key reference for understanding the nature, depth, and significance of the poet's journey. **Methodology:** The study employed the descriptive analytical approach for its ability to identify and discuss the sources and influences, as well as explain the mechanism of their influence in the poetic text. **Results:** The study reached several conclusions, the most important of them are: Qabbani's childhood, family, and where he lived had a significant effect on the themes, language, and thoughts of his poetry. Moreover, Qabbani's engagement with the Arab and Western cultural and artistic influences was evident, reflecting in his poetic texts through language, styles, and perspective. The study also showed that Qabbani has contradictory views on the issues of women and love. **Previous Studies:** The researcher did not find any study that discussed the cultural influences of Qabbani's poetry, which gives the study its artistic and critical value. **Conclusion:** "My Story with Poetry" has both cultural and critical value in knowing the ins and outs of Qabbani's poetic journey, cultural sources, critical beliefs, and poem-writing process.

Keywords: Influences, Experience, Nazar Qabbani, Poetry.

Introduction

The poet's account on the cultural, intellectual, social, diplomatic, artistic, aesthetic, and spatial influences that shaped his poetic journey serves as the basis behind *قصتي مع الشعر* "My Story with Poetry" (Qabbani, 2000). This necessitates the researcher to examine these influences as sources through their poetic embodiment, and to determine their importance and how they affected the poet's perspective and poetic language. While the poet acknowledges the significant effect of these influences on his poems, language, perspective, and poetic texts; the researcher finds that some influences have strong and clear effects, while others have limited effects, and others have been hidden and concealed, since the poet deliberately creates a perfect, transcendent scene for his cultural components and influences in his experience that reach the narcissism level, and reflects the image of a human who is self-centered, obsessed with himself, praises, glorifies, and exalts it, and sees that there is nothing like it on earth (El Yousfi, 2002, P. 196).

This study attempts to provide a comprehensive overview of the cultural, intellectual, and life sources and influences that together shaped Nizar Qabbani's poetic talent, and how they affected his poetic text. In order to achieve the study aim, the researcher divided the study into five main chapters, which together form the culture, intellect, and life influences. The first chapter discusses childhood milestones (birth, family, education); the aesthetics and charm of the place are discussed in the second chapter; the Arab-Lebanese and Western-French cultural influences are specifically examined in the third chapter; the fourth chapter outlines the diplomatic experience in London, Madrid, and Beijing; and the final chapter highlights the issues of women and love.

The study employed the descriptive analytical approach for its ability to monitor, identify, and trace phenomena and influences in Qabbani's poetry, then analyze, discuss, and comment on them. The researcher did not find any previous theoretical studies that address the cultural and artistic influences mentioned in "My Story with Poetry" using the methodology and perspective explored in this study. Instead, previous researches relied on the literary and critical context that dealt with Qabbani's literary experience

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in general, and did not specify their readings to "My Story with Poetry" in particular, such as "Cultural Criticism, Reading in Arab Cultural Systems" (Al-Ghathami, 2001), "Narcissism in Nizar Qabbani's Literature" (Najem, 1983), or "Studies in Modern Arabic Literature" (Haddara, 1996).

First: Childhood

Nizar Qabbani immerses the reader in an idyllic world, and a childhood surrounded by a Nordic aura whose features begin at birth in mythical settings. He says, "**I was born on March 21, 1923. The earth was also in a state of birth, as the spring was ready to open its green bags, as the world and my mother were both pregnant at the same time, and they both gave birth at the same time... It was intended for me to be like March, which is a month marked by metamorphosis and change**" (Qabbani, 2000, P. 26).

His saying revolves around a mythical space where the mother is absent and reduced into the biological role in order to bring in the scene of his birth and childhood allowing him to achieve the identification with the paradise of the beginning. He also adds a sense of humanity to objects and entities to symbolize how they celebrate him. The birth scene is recreated on his 69th birthday, as he wrote in the poem القصيدة تولد من أصابعها "The Poem is Born from Her Fingers" from the collection of أنا رجل واحد وأنت قبيلة من النساء "I'm One Man and You Are a Tribe of Women" (Qabbani, 2000):

"I was born...

On the twenty-first of March, that gloomy day when the earth is going through adolescence

The trees get pregnant... What happened in our house? , no one answered me...

But I felt that a woman in our house is living a case of innovation."

Regarding family formation and its impact on the poetic experience, the poet excluded his mother "Faezeh" from the mental and intellectual circle, and out of the thinking circle. This excludes her from being a source of influence as Nizar elevates the father's authority and lowers the mother's status. Consequently, the father becomes the center of discourse both psychologically and physically (El Yousfi, 2002, P. 117). Qabbani's saying: "**I grew up on a land of fire and water, between my father's revolutionary thinking and my mother's Salafist thinking. I had an innate preference for my father's fire over my mother's water**", has become the primary influencer in the formation of a man with a dominant Eastern masculinity, that is associated with the ancient Arab world of virility, where a woman becomes a body of sexual pleasure and loses her identity and existence. This is evident in his early 1940s poetry collections, which include the collections: "The Brunette Told Me" (1944), "طفولة نهد" "Childhood of a Cleavage" (1948), "سامبا" "Samba" (1949), "أنت لي" "You Are Mine" (1950).

However, the mother's influence affects the poetic texts that are rich in body-related terminology. In other words, the Freudian oral stage (lactation stage) formed the network in which his first collections of poems meet. This can be noted in "My Story with Poetry" in which he mentions that the oral stage continued (breastfeeding) till the age of seven (Qabbani, 2000, P. 73), which is the child's first stage of sexual orientation, as pointed out by Freud, and this is a psychological and physiological opinion (Freud, no date, P. 12). The oral stage became unbalanced, as a result, the terms of "النهدي breast", "الحلمة nipple" and "الفم mouth" became key terms that feed the poetic texts in the first stage, known as "the stage of thirst and hunger for sex" (Najem, 1983, P. 123). The breast was repeated fifty times in his four poetry collections in the first stage and thirty-two times in the collection "أشعار خارجة عن القانون" "Outlaw Poems", as there is a poem about the "Mouth", the "Breast", and one for the "Lips". He said in his poem "نهداكي" "Your Breasts" from "The Brunette Told Me" Collection (Qabbani, 2002):

"Brunette, pour tawny breasts into the world of my mouth

Your breasts are a fountain of red pleasure, igniting my blood

Your breasts were not made to be covered, but for the mouth"

However, excluding the mother from a mental and intellectual point of view, did not affect the maternal affection as she is "**a spring of affections**" (Qabbani, 2000, P. 73), and soon the spring of longing flows for his mother during his diplomatic journey, writing poetry for her from Spain. His poems reflect the noble human feelings of sorrow and nostalgia. He wrote in his poem *خمس رسائل إلى أمي* "Five Letters to My Mother" from the collection of *الرسم بالكلمات* "Painting with Words" (Qabbani, 2002):

"Good morning, sweetie

Good morning, my sweet saint, this is September, Mother,

and here is sorrow bringing me its gifts..

This is September, where is Damascus?"

On the other hand, his father Tawfiq Qabbani played a significant role in "*My Story with Poetry*", as even though the physical resemblance was secondary between the poet and his father in comparison to the psychological resemblance, as he states: "**Although I look like him in my physical appearance, I am even more like him psychologically. My dad was a candy maker and revolutionary... and I inherited this contradiction in my father's personality which also appeared in my poetry**" (Qabbani, 2000, P. 79). Additionally, the identification and resemblance between the son and the father point to an Eastern masculine-centered virility, that hides behind the cultural framework and operates under its influence. The poet, Qabbani, remained deeply influenced by the Arab cultural system and helped to keep it fueled with ecstasy and continuity, despite his attempts to portray himself as a man with a message that aims to eradicate the Eastern masculine authoritarian tendency. Regarding the physical appearance, the son's identification with the father and his embodiment of him is evident in the poem *أبي* "My Father" from his collection *قصائد* "Poems" (Qabbani, 2002), as he says:

"Is your father dead?

A delusion... My father never dies

I carried you when my eyes were awake until

people thought that I am my father

I even carry you in the tone of my voice

So, how did you go, and you still within me?"

Qabbani's references to the revolution and his father's candy-making are deeply ingrained in his psychology and poetic texts; to become the main elements of his poetic world, which is centered on a narcissistic scene that reaches the limits of self-worship. A sensual, lustful, and erotic element directed towards the female body in his erotic poetic texts, and a masochistic, sadistic element in his political poetic texts.

Wesal, the poet's elder sister —the explicitly declared and the implicitly hidden— represents an active factor in his writings about love, he states: "**to compensate for what she was deprived of, and to take revenge on against a society that rejects love and chases it with axes and guns**" (Qabbani, 2000, P. 72). However, this active factor raises concerns and doubts regarding the motive behind her suicide. Hence, the poet draws a romantic scene for her suicide using a phrase that was deliberately written for self-esteem and amplification; he wrote: "**I still remember her angelic face, and luminous features... in her death she**

looked more beautiful than Rābi'a Al-'Adawiyya... and more magnificent than the Egyptian Cleopatra".

The declared reveals the hidden and exposes it. How can this matter be justified? is it OK that she committed suicide because she "**could not marry her lover?**" (Qabbani, 2000, P. 70) while, as he says, she "**is from a family that takes love as a job**" (Qabbani, 2000, P. 71). The scene in the book ends between the text's announcement of the suicide and the murder that it conceals. The hidden element confirms that his sister Wesal does not appear directly in the poet's texts; rather, she appears disguised and implicit, in the image of the Eastern woman as a victim. Woman lives in "**the East that rejects love, and considers it an illegitimate child**" (Qabbani, 2000, P. 123). From here, the murdered sister's voice sneaks in, rejecting and cursing the East in several poems like حبلى "Knocked Up", رسالة من سيدة حاقة "Letter from a Hateful Lady" from the collection "Poems", and a complete poetic collection titled يوميات امرأة لا مبالية "Diaries of an Indifferent Woman" (Qabbani, 2002).

Second: The Aesthetics of the Place and Allure

As the place is surrounded by beauty that make it a paradise full of charming colors, aromatic scents, and familiarity and intimacy that prevail among beings and entities, giving them a human touch, the place received amazing praises in "*My Story with Poetry*" that are based on the protection values of the house. "**Symphony of Light, Shadow, and Marble**" is the title of the house that Qabbani describes in his book (Qabbani, 2000, P. 32). This place with its many aesthetics characteristics and beauty will undoubtedly make its way into the realms of poetic texts because it is "more than a natural view, it is a psychological state" (Qabbani, 1984, P. 105), as revealed in his biography and poetic texts.

In his poetic works, the texts are full with colors, scents, flowers, and varied plant names, that are extracted from the beauty of the Damascene House. There are texts that restore the beauty of the Damascene house in its various dimensions such as أبي "My father" from his collection "Poems", "Five Letters To My Mother" from the collection "Painting with Words", and "On the clouds" from the collection "Childhood of a Cleavage". Qabbani says in his poem "My House" from his collection "Poems" (Qabbani, 2002):

"The limits of my house... a cloud

A cloud that passed and wings that fluttered"

Also, in the poem "The Poem is Born from Her Fingers" from the collection "I'm One Man and You Are a Tribe of Women" (Qabbani, 2002) he said:

"Damascus is where I was born

between jasmine

The green mallow...

The narcissus...

and in my language, there is still something of cinnamon, cumin and allspice"

At the National Scientific College, Qabbani discovers the significant role the poet Khalil Mardam Bey played in forming his literary preferences and poetic memory by selecting poems that convey an aesthetic setting through the theme, vocabulary, and chosen imagery of the world of spinning and love, rather than illustrating a deserted or ruined landscape. He says: "**He made us avoid walking on the stones and the abandoned flora of most of Al-Jāhiliyyah (pre-Islamic) Arabic poetry and guided us to the shaded pathways and oasis in Arabic poetry. He deserves the credit for planting the rose of poetry under my skin**" (Qabbani, 2000, P. 46). However, Qabbani does not explicitly refer to a specific poet of pre-Islamic poetry or particular poems in "*My Story with Poetry*" or leaves any thread to cling into in order to

identify the mechanism of the migration of the professor Khalil Mardam Bey's themes as influences on his poetic formation. Yet, a closer look reveals that the professor himself had an influence on Qabbani's poetic texts not as a teacher but as a poet. The poem "Dance" by Khalil Mardam Bey, which somehow part of the poetry collection entitled "Samba" by Nizar Qabbani, is the embodied example of the efficacy of influence.

The "Dance" poem and the "Samba" poetry collection meet in form and content; however, "Samba" collection differs in the musical pace which illustrates how successfully Mardam Bey influenced Qabbani. The two poems share the same which illustrates the theme of a dancing night full of lust and lights; heroes are bodies full of vibrant and luscious. Accordingly, the poetic lexicon reveals the extent of language conformity "(e.g., نهد الثدي (breast), عرايا عراء (naked), ثغر فم (mouth), جيد عنق (neck), اعتناق اعتناق (embracing), ساق ساق (leg)". Among the indicative examples from Mardam Bey's poem is his saying:

Every couple who has joined together, would embrace with a profound embrace

If water were poured between them, it would hardly flow for their dear bound

And on the melodies, their steps were taken with perfect harmony and balance

Among the examples of Samba's poetry collection is Qabbani's following verses (Qabbani, 2002):

"I said they melted

Joint attached to joint

And bones penetrate...

And clothes...

That is Samba...

A move... then... a bend

The lit lamps

Are playing"

Drawing also forms an effective influence in Qabbani's literary experience, where the texts included colors. He says, "**I have drowned in color vials for two or three years... I have drawn roses, fruits, boats, forests, beaches, and naked women, and that was a major part of my artistic formation and also shaped my poetic language**" (Qabbani, 2000, P. 60). The effectiveness of the influence lies in the poet's ability to employ colors on the descriptive, figurative, and symbolic level, connecting them to the associative, objective, personal, and physiological response patterns of the audience (Thyab, 1985, P. 122). In the poem "على الغيم" "On the Clouds" from the collection "Childhood of a Cleavage," Qabbani combines between the recipient's response patterns. "Our walk, on the blood of sunset", for instance, is associative; "Our paths are silver" is objective; "My love has the color of fire" is personal; and "You, with the young winy-stoma" is physiological.

In regard to the utilization patterns, the descriptive level has dominated, followed by the figurative level, as in "My love has the color of fire", and the symbolic level, which is based on the exchange of sensory inputs. This concept is defined by Baudelaire, who mentions that: "**Colors, scents, and sounds interact; and the senses can create a unified psychological impact**" (Alsomily, 1980, P. 224). In the poem "ورقة إلى القارئ" "Paper to the Reader" from "The Brunette Told Me" Collection, Nizar Qabbani expressed the concept as poetry which can be seen in the following verses (Qabbani, 2002):

"I dreamed so much that I made scents visible

and one can smell the echo's vibration"

The collection of "Painting with Words" may achieve the value of artistic overlap: Painting and poetry, which is confirmed by Leonardo Da Vinci who mentions that: "**Painting is poetry which is seen and not heard, Poetry is a painting which is heard but not seen**" (Rogers, 1990, P. 46). The poem "Maritime" from the collection "Painting with Words" represents the highest stage of artistic development in employing inputs of sense exchange in a symbolic way. Qabani (2002) wrote:

"In the blue harbor of your eyes

Blow rains of melodious lights"

Yet, the dominance of the descriptive level prevented the psychological and mental domains from appearing in favor of the formal and aesthetic domains. The poetic vocabulary lexicon reveals the dominance of the red color in the first stage, as it was used sixty times for its association with women's sensory world (Nofal, no date, P. 103). On the other hand, his elaboration about how drawing shaped his poetic language, he leans on the visual image more than the verbal image (white and black, space, icon, numbering, and segmentation). This is because the structure in the poem does not replace the visual image with the verbal image because it requires both, and neither can dispense the other (Al-Talawy, 1998, P. 19). It is also clear that the poet has adapted the inputs of his experience in painting to the benefit of the poetic experience.

Third: Arab and Western Cultural Influences

Arab-Lebanese Cultural Influence

Qabbani's love poetry texts as a whole have a poetic perspective that is focused on "the self, making it the center of the world" (Aljayar, 1995, P. 236). This is evident in the dominance of the self-referential and lyrical tone. Simultaneously, it moves to condemn the society viewing it with hostility due to the collective self's suffering at the hands of the social self, which suppresses it and kills its desires and freedom (El Hawi, 1983, P. 46). The poem سؤال "Question" from the collection "Childhood of a Cleavage" is one example of an ideal poem that has a dreamy vision of women, nature, life, and death. The romance of the scene and its idealism with nature and the lover are portrayed in the poem شرق "East" from the same collection, this can be seen in the following verses (Qabbani, 2002):

"The jars of color were broken, our date

is in the clouds, beneath the windows of the East

In the turquoise ports, our journey"

Furthermore, Qabbani's romance is a natural extension of Arab romanticism, since his first reading immersed in Lebanese Arabic literature, as he stated, "**I used to read with fascination the Lebanese Poets' Works like Ameen Nakhla, Elias Abu Shabaki, Bechara El-Khoury, Said Akl, Salah Labaki, Michel Trad, and Yūsuf Ghuṣṣūb**" (Qabbani, 2000, P. 116). However, his statement does not specify the nature of the influence, its mechanisms, and images. It is a generic statement that opens to wide spaces. He only made an explicit reference to the book "Diaries of Ameen Nakhla" by Ameen Nakhla, where the influence is evident when reading it and his collection of poetry. In addition to the poet Elias Abu Shabaki and his poetic collection "Paradise Snakes" and the critical perspectives of Said Akl, where the mechanism of textual interaction is revealed and its influence on Qabbani's poetic perspective.

Ironically, Ameen Nakhla as a poet had more influence on Qabbani than he did as a prose writer, contrary to Qabbani's statement in "My Story with Poetry". Ameen Nakhla's rural diary is not influential in Qabbani's poetic texts, although it impacted his language while writing "My Story with Poetry", in which the descriptive language controls Ameen Nakhla's diary and Qabbani's book. This is especially evident in Qabbani's description of his Damascene house and his first school. Similar to the rural diary, Qabbani's definition of

some concepts is ambiguous, idealistic, and romantic. For example, he defines poetry as: **"A mythical beast that people have not seen, but they have seen its footprints on the ground. Poetry is a fluid that evaporates and expands very quickly"** (Qabbani, 2000, P. 23) using a language that is very close to Ameen Nakhla's in his diary when he describes the ink as in **"It is a black light and a liquid treasure! It is the notebooks scent, irrigation of whitening, and paper's rain, rather, it is the engraving of passion and the color of minds on paper"** (Nakhla, 1982, P. 7).

It turns out that Qabbani was influenced by the poet Nakhla's lexicon, which centered his attention on the woman's aesthetic world. This is where the true influence on Qabbani's poetic texts lies, particularly in the titles and themes of the poems in which the impact appears to be substantial to the close matching limits. The similarity between them confirms the reality and nature of the influence, which is disclosed by examining the poetry titles, for example: the titles of Nakhla's poems **العقد الطويل** "Long Necklace", **الشفة** "Lip", **الفم** "Mouth", **القميص الأزرق** "Blue Shirt", **الأظافر** "Nails", **المشط** "Comb", **الوردة الحمراء** "Red Rose", **الثوب الأخضر** "Green Dress", **الكحل** "Eyeliner", are similar to those of Qabbani's poems **القرط الطويل** "Long Earring", **الشفة** "Lip", **فم** "Mouth", **المايوه الأزرق** "Blue Bikini", **مانيكور** "Manicure", **أزرار** "Buttons", **أنواب** "Dresses", **ثوب النوم الوردي** "Rose", **وردة** "Rose", **ثوب النوم الوردي** "Pink Nightgown", **رافعة النهدي** "Lifting her Breast" (Qabbani, 2002).

The Lebanese poet Elias Abu Shabaki, especially his poetic collection **أفاعي الفردوس** "Paradise Snakes", had a clear, unique, and varied influence on Qabbani poetic experience (Abu Shabaki, 1985). Based on the idea of living the experience of "flesh and blood, night and lust" (El Hawi, 1983, P. 194), "Paradise Snakes" depicts a woman that appears in a terrifying and hideous image, like a snake, a symbol of sin, and nothing more than a body teeming with lusts and sins.

The perspective in "Paradise Snakes" collection, directly affects Qabbani's poetic texts, where they textually exist in Qabbani's collection "The Brunette Told Me". There are poems in the collection that derives their context and vocabularies from "Paradise Snakes" collection; even in their perspectives of the woman who is engaged in prostitution as in **البيغي** "Prostitution" (Qabbani, 2002) and **هيكل الشهوات** "In the Temple of Lusts" (Abu Shabaki, 1985). Additionally, the many and varied poems of Qabbani—including **مدنسة الحليب** "Milk Spoiler", **البيغي** "Prostitution", **نهداك** "Your Breasts", **أفيقي** "Wake Up", **إلى عجوز** "To an Old Woman", and **إلى زائرة** "To a Visitor"—clearly demonstrate Abu Shabaki's textual effect on the titles, themes, and vocabulary of his poetry. For instance, Abu Shabaki's poems are entitled **القاذورة** "Filth", **الأفعى** "Snake", "In the Temple of Lusts", and "Sodom". The following line from "The Snake" serves as an illustration of the textual influence (Abu Shabaki, 1985):

"You will own her as you wish, yet, fear not

For her son is still ignorant of the matter

I tell her: your husband's veins are still

And in his heart the affection of parenting has not yet been healed"

While Qabbani wrote describing the same woman in "Milk Spoiler" (Qabbani, 2002):

"Your breasts' milk boom has dried up...

A food for a suspicious visitor...

Your humble, caring hubby...

Far from you, you his honor and mother of his children"

The critical perspectives between Abu Shabaki and Qabbani are close to each other, since the former, in

the introduction of his complete poetic collection, calls for the notion of going beyond the narrow, limited lexicon and using the language freely without any limitations to walk on the right poetic path (El Hawi, 1983). Qabbani adopts the same notion with its contexts and calls for it, as he says: **"I took liberty when using the language of Lisan al-Arab and Muhit Al-Muhit, and I persuaded them to sit with people in cafes"** (Qabbani, 2000, P. 122). On the other hand, they both agree that theories and doctrines should be eliminated from poetry. In addition to that, Qabbani shares the Lebanese poet Said Akl's point of view that music is the essence of poetry and that it plays a significant role in the creation and formation of poetry. Said Akl asserts: **"The melody of the poem controls me before the rhythm"** (Alsomily, 1980, P. 245). Qabbani mentions in *"My Story with Poetry"*: **"I consider the melody before its meaning"** (Qabbani, 2000, P. 61).

Western-French Cultural Influence

Qabbani's linguistic formation was not limited to Arabic, but rather, under the French mandate in Syria, it opened up to the French language, as he stated in *"My Story with Poetry"*: **"I have grown within the French culture, reading Racine Molière, Corneille, Musset, Baudelaire, and Paul Valéry"** (Qabbani, 2000, P. 43). However, by exposing the cultural influences, Qabbani obscures the mechanisms in which French writers influenced his poetic formation. He lists the names of French poets without referring to specific literary works, purposefully eliminating at the same time the name of Jacques Brever, who have a clear influence, rather, it seems that Qabbani plagiarized some of his own poems. This plagiarism requires the researcher to highlight the ways in which French writers shaped and influenced his poetic formation and how he plagiarized some of Jacques Prévert's poems.

Even though the effect is superficial and does not touch its depth, titles like Garconne Ala, Christian Dior, and Manicure that are drawn from the French vocabulary field serve as a first step to emphasize this influence (Qabbani, 2002). The French poet Paul Valéry influenced Qabbani's poetic formation, and was present in his poetic texts and critical opinions, and this can be seen in the collection *"Diaries of an Indifferent Woman"* which represents a scene that reveals the influence of Paul Valéry poetic collection *ربة القدر الصغرى* "Little Goddess of Destiny".

Even the perspective of the two collections is based on the concepts of similarity and difference. Similarity between both stem from the idea of desires that reside the female body at the peak of its maturity and the suffering it endures during its youth, and the perception of its femininity that is being suppressed and controlled. "Little Goddess of Destiny", in which the call of femininity awakens in flesh and blood, and with it the voice of lust and desire rises, **"Her femininity bursts forth like a ripe fruit, longing to be picked up... the desire flames within her breast, which has been on the fence for so long... and from her breast, in the still of the night, she drinks the milk of her dreams"** (Shahean, 1988).

Similarly, the woman in the collection *"Diaries of an Indifferent Woman"* is a body that flames with lust and desire. She wonders (Qabbani, 2002):

"For whom my breast grows?

For whom... are its cherries twirled?

For whom its apples blossom?"

The difference between them is related to the way the woman deals with the desires of her body. This difference raises questions and wonders because, although the conscious mind and the ideal, angelic spiritual tendency of the "Little Goddess of Destiny" are enough to deal with the desires, it is found that there is a paradox with Qabbani. He portrays the Eastern woman in an inferior image, suggesting that it is not the mind or the soul that forbid her from practicing her desires, but rather the thought of the East and its repressive religious, cultural, and social powers. Qabbani's vision in his poetry for the Eastern woman differs from Paul Valéry's of the French woman. This is evident in his words, saying on behalf of a woman in *"Diaries of an Indifferent Woman"* collection:

"My friends are...

Hostages bought and sold in the market of myths...

Captives among the Eastern ladies... dead but not dead...

Like a smell, they live and die in the gove of the bottles"

As for the critical perspective, Qabbani seems to be affected by Valéry's idea regarding the difference between poetry language and prose language, as Valéry states that "**poetry is to prose as dancing is to walking**" (Kanouny, 1997, P. 16). This is due to the music role in moving the artistic and figurative language energies, which makes it different from the direct and explicit language of prose. In his work, Qabbani thus quotes this viewpoint and states, as Valéry mentions, that "**Poetry is a dance... poetry is a dance through language**". (Qabbani, 2000, P. 19).

Besides, the impact of Molière may be seen in Qabbani's texts on the poetic language level. Molière preferred to use spoken language in his writings rather than the lofty and refined language that writers desired (Al Halwy, 1994). The linguistic performance in Molière's work, which demonstrates a strong creative ability to capture vocabularies drawn from lived reality and what the public utters, is comparable to what Nizar's poetry texts demonstrate. This helped to create a sense of intimacy and understanding between Nizar and his audience. As for Jack Prevert, who Qabbani exclude and did not mention within the French Influence Circle, his impact is evident in Qabbani's poems "With a Newspaper" and "Morning Meal" from "Poems" collection (Qabbani, 2002), since they have been taken from Jack Prevert collection "Parols" (Prevert, 1995).

Fourth: The Diplomatic Experience in London, Madrid and Beijing

Qabbani served as a diplomatic attaché in the Syrian embassy in more than one country. He did not discuss in "*My Story with Poetry*" the impact of the diplomatic experience itself, but he referred directly to the psychological and cultural impact that the capitals and places had on him and how they affected his poetic experience. The Spanish capital of Madrid had a significant impact on the historical dimension that links the Arabs in Andalusia; London was able to clear his mind of dust, while Beijing, East Asia, left him sad and pale (Qabbani, 2000).

Arab Andalusia, with all its historical and emotional weight, was present in Qabbani's poetic texts that reveal the impact of the Spanish Madrid experience. Qabbani restored it with the help of the civilized architectural visuals of the Arab presence centuries ago, which in turn allowed the memory to be unlocked in order to create a comparison between a past that symbolizes the existence of Arabs and Islam and a present from which they were driven, leaving only archaeological landmarks that continue to practice their work in Qabbani's memory. Of that, *مذكرات أندلسية* "Andalusian Memoirs", *أحزان في الأندلس* "Sorrows in Andalusia", "Granada" and *أوراق إسبانية* "Spanish Papers" (Qabbani, 2002). All these poetic texts compare two Arab eras and have a depressing psychological impact on him. Spain's modern reality is also present in these texts, although it is linked to its Andalusian predecessor. In *أحزان العرب في الأندلس* "The Sorrows of the Arabs in Andalusia," a poem from the collection "Painting with Words", he states (Qabbani, 2002):

"Nothing left of Córdoba

But the tears of the weeping minarets

But the aroma of roses, orange blossoms and dahlias

Five centuries have passed... my dear

As if we are leaving Spain today"

In London, the experience forms cultural trauma to Qabbani's consciousness, as he decries the Arab East, and sees it as a peripheral part of the civilizational formation. In his poetry and prose, Qabbani elevates the West while eliminating the East as a dark epicenter. The reason behind that are the ignorance, backwardness, the state of negative religiosity that people live in, and the dominance of metaphysics. The East has become backward and culturally regressive as a result of all these reasons. He says about that: **"The British experience placed me in a new, humanistic, and civilized framework that I was in dire need of; London provided me with intellectual reassurance and washed my thirsty oriental grass"** (Qabbani, 2000, P. 106).

The poem *خبز وحشيش وقمر* "Bread, Grass, and Moon" from the collection "Poems," which reflects the deep influence of the London experience, contains the textual expression of Nizar's perspectives, which developed into an orientalist perspective. He said (Qabbani, 2002):

What does the light pill do?

In my country

In the prophets' homeland

What is in heaven?

For the weak and sluggish...

Lastly, it is shown that his mental state as a result of loneliness and the loss of the intimate environment he was accustomed to permeate every poem he wrote in Beijing, the capital of China. This is shown in his poems *ثلاث بطاقات من آسيا* "Three Cards from Asia" and *نهر الأحزان* "River of Sorrows" from the collection *حبيبي* "My Love" (Qabbani, 2002).

Fifth: Love and Woman

Modernity, in Qabbani's poetic understanding, is based on adopting a contradictory discourse that has both explicit and implicit meaning. However, the essence of his modernist discourse contradicts its appearance and its explicit meaning, and its results contradict its purposes, as he aims to establish an Arab culture that poses its questions to the present and the future, transcending, as he said, **"All cultural, psychological and historical legacies to destroy the outdated mental clock which creates a state of linguistic, historical, rhetorical, grammatical, moral and religious terror"** (Qabbani, 2000, P. 81-96). Qabbani, in his sharp criticism of the values of the historical Arab culture, which has contributed—as he believes—to the deepening of problems of surrounding civilizational development and subjecting it to stagnation and inertia, under the oppressive and authoritative tribal logic; seeks to build a revolutionary culture. This culture is open to both self and the other, aiming to liberate Arab human beings from sediments of oppression and backwardness, specifically in relation to the concepts of love and woman. Though, the poetic text reveals the depth of the gap between the real and the imaginary, between what he wants and aspires to and what the texts really hide, which contributes to the consecration of reactionary culture, not modernity, and transforms his revolutionary modernist project on the system to **"His complete subordination and latitude under its cultural condition"** (Al-Ghathami, 2001, P. 246). Qabbani was under the illusion that he would dismantle and transcend the traditional Arab system.

Hence, Qabbani's poetic discourse is, in fact, a return to the virile model, a restoration of the ancestors, and a comparison between David Herbert Lawrence and Oscar Wilde to clarify what he meant in his liberation and enlightenment project. It is a distorting and falsifying reality, as both poets faced opposition from their societies which rejected their explicit literature. As a result, they were put on trial and faced the wrath of the church. On the other hand, Qabbani received applause and recognition in the Arab world, which he mentioned in *"My Story with Poetry"*. This, in turn, reveals Qabbani's contradictions and inconsistencies (Qabbani, 2000).

Confirming what the researcher has said is that Qabbani recalls the legacy of his ancestors in the poetic texts, despite his prose writings in which he proclaims to surpass them. Qabbani said: **"I am fighting for the liberation of Arab women from the sediments of the pre-Islamic era"**. This claim is contradicted by Qabbani own adherence to the masculine Eastern cultural system—a tendency towards virility. Within this framework, he transforms the world into a women's republic subjected to virility, as he does not become a real man unless he feminizes all the others (Al-Ghathami, 2001, P. 255). According to Qabbani's discourse, the liberation of Arab women is achieved through complete sexual freedom. This requires a certain age for women—the age of youth, maturity, and physical beauty. This researcher's point of view is supported by textual evidence, including the poems "Your Breast" and "To an Old Woman" from the collection "The Brunette Told Me", as well as "Lolita" from the collection "My Love" (Qabbani, 2002).

The Transcendent Human Love Experience, as revealed by Qabbani's poetic and prose texts, appears as a troubled experience. It causes the beloved woman to revolve in the orbit of the man she loves and serves as a means through which Qabbani practices his deification and worship of himself, placing the woman in the subordinate position. This is evident in his saying: **I cannot love a woman who does not share my interests or tiny whims, and the Poetry of love is one of several passports I use** (Qabbani, 2000, P. 28). His poetry collection "One-Hundred Love Letters" (Qabbani, 2000) makes this very evident. In addition, he declares this reference in the poem "Except with Me" from the collection "Painting with Words" (Qabbani, 2002):

"You will always remember my fingers...

So sleep with whoever you want

and make love on the sidewalks

You will never be a woman except with me"

It is clear for the readers that the experience of love in Qabani's poetic and prose texts is centered around sex, even though the experience is in fact "a sexual desire that seeks fulfillment" (Najem, 1983, P. 254). This is confirmed by the use of a large female body lexicon. In addition, Qabani's poetic collection أشعار خارجة عن القانون "Outlaw Poems" supports the researcher's assertion that it represents a great presence of the body's vocabulary. As for Qabani's speech about sex, it presents a bleak scene where the woman is condemned for being related to a repressive dichotomy—female equal shame. In the East, sexual legislation is measured by the size of its instincts, and Qabbani, in his ongoing criticism of Eastern culture, seeks to absolve himself from everything he has written, claiming that he has merely drawn a picture of the Arab reality in its interactions and treating women and did not create it himself (Qabbani, 2000).

Many Arab researchers point to the fact that Qabani's discourse is subject to orientalist perspectives (El Yousfi, 2002). The perspective and writings of the Orientalists toward the Arab East does not differ from Qabani's perspective. These writings and perspectives are strongly able to penetrate the modernist Arab speeches calling for the necessity to modernize and change Arab reality. This reveals the significant gap and clear conflict between intentions and results as well as between the explicate and the implicate. For example, the comparison between the French officer Joseph-Marie Moiret's writings on the status of women in the Arab East, and what Qabbani produced in his poetic and prose discourse will reveal the significant match between them. The image of the East appears as a static, solid, and rigid image, which appears in Qabbani's poetic collection "Diaries of an Indifferent Woman", as well as in his poetic collection "Outlaw Poems".

Conclusion

The study concludes with a set of results that formed the answers for its main questions. In regard to the cultural influences that led to shaping Nizar Qabbani's literary experience through "My Story with Poetry", it has been found that the cultural and social influences had a significant role in Qabbani's literary experience. The image of his mother, father, and sister in his childhood, had a direct impact on his poetry. Moreover,

Damascus had a significant impact on the use of plant-related vocabulary in his poetry. His poetry, music, and perspective on life and art were significantly affected by Arab-Lebanese writers such as Amin Nakhla, Elias Abu Shabaki, and Said Akl. He was influenced by their critical viewpoints, vocabulary, lexical structures, the artistic images they used, and their literary styles. Similarly, he was influenced by French writers, such as Paul Valéry, Molière, and other poets who Qabbani did not mention. For example, Qabbani took two complete poems from Jack Prevert without referring to him, which is a clear case of plagiarism.

Furthermore, his thoughts, opinions, literary preferences, and poetic mood were also significantly affected by the capitals of the world. For example, the Spanish capital of Madrid with its Andalusian Arab Islamic heritage; the Chinese capital, which had a sad effect on his spirit and poetry due to isolation and loneliness; and his time in London, which contributed in the intellectual and cultural comparisons between the East and the West.

Finally, the study's most notable finding regarding Qabbani's experience is his relationship with women and love which is seen through his poetry. On the theoretical level, he was a strong supporter of women's liberation and the idea of love. Yet, in his poetry writings, he contradicted this to a great extent. In his poems, the women were more objects of sexual pleasure than a soul and a mind. In addition to other issues pertaining to the concepts of modernity and heritage, the researcher believes that "*My Story with Poetry*" provides a fertile material for addressing other issues, including the critical opinions that Qabbani launched on his poetry.

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