

**OMER BIN MUSABAH BIN JAMIL AL-SAADI**

(A'Sharqiyah University, Ibra, Oman)

ORCID: 0009-0000-2957-1016 

## **The Mythical Fantasy in the Contemporary Omani Women's Novel: A Study of Three Omani Works**

### **Abstract**

Until a very recent time, oral myths and legends have been prominently present in the history of Oman. They became a prominent theme within the Omani literary community, long inspiring its writers and poets to weave a complex tapestry of evocative tales. Such key literary voices include the Omani female novelists, who primarily asserted their ancestral linkage to grandmothers and mothers, showcasing their supremacy and dominance over their male counterparts in exploring mythical fantasy. Notably, the fiction they crafted was enriched with a range of insights, visions, and ideologies borrowed from diverse cultures and civilizations to ensure their passage across generations. The stories they told were often based on dialogue of multiple styles, languages, and voices. Thanks to their amazing talent, they were able to weave such elements into an artistic, literary fabric. This has encouraged the selection of three Omani women's mythical novels, namely: *They Are Not Mentioned in Majaz* (2022) by Huda Hamed, *Hawra Nizwa* (2022) by Fawzia Al-Fahdi, and *The Death Party* (2009) by Fatma Al-Shidi. This approach will focus on dialogism in the literary and non-literary works of Bakhtin (1895–1975), extracting the mythical texts incorporated by the Omani novelist in her work, as well as, exposing the link between polyphonic narrative, diversity of dialogue, and the conflicting multi-perspective ideologies in the Omani women's novel. The problem of the study is to seek proper answers to the questions regarding the relationship between reality and myth; the internal and external relationships of dialogue; the types of the narrative voices; the



relationship between dialogue and polyphonic narratives through the chronicle; and the depth of the diverse dialogic interaction and the dynamics behind this.

**Keywords:** Fiction, Myth, Omani women's novels, Bakhtin's dialogism

## Introduction

Fiction is an invented story produced by one's imagination, as opposed to reality, although they may sometimes overlap. Although myth is a symbolic narrative telling the stories of deities, iconic heroes and ancestors, it is usually taken seriously by storytellers as a matter of belief and truth. Myths overlap with tales, folktales and fables with regards to the creation of heroes and historical events. However, the absence of a solid historical basis for such events, facts and heroes contributes to questioning its existence.

Myths are largely associated with mothers and grandmothers, for they are the primary storytellers of time, spinning new supernatural imaginary events where everything is possible to help their children fall asleep. In addition, man is known by his fear of death and disease. This fear led mankind to seek solace in the supernatural, magic and myths to which the Omani society attaches healing powers.

All nations across the world have participated in the creation and recreation of myth and fiction in different formats, given how their discourse stretches to ancient times. In fact, they considered myth and fiction a means to express their psychological dilemmas and bitter conflicts passing across generations in the history of human civilization. Firas Al-Sawwah, writer of numerous books on mythology and the history of religions, defines myth as follows: "one of the most prominent phenomena of human culture; a traditional tale in which the metaphysical beings play the main roles."<sup>1</sup> Like her counterparts across the world, the Omani novelist used myth to express her cultural concerns with fear, injustice, racism and oppression. She was able to employ myth in her novel for the cause and objective of liberation. It is clear that her narrative style is affected by myth, as she attempts to establish her rights using different ways of writing given her mental capabilities and vivid imagination.

The inclination towards myth came as response to a cultural and creative imperative necessitated by feminist narratives. This is to avoid the creation of customary, familiar narratives, representing their conscious that aches for a breakthrough and wishes to transcend everything that symbolizes women within society and its patriarchal figures. All three feminist novels have incorporated the elements of myths in their stories. For example, they use mysterious noises teetering between reality and fiction. In addition, some of the noises they use have a divine vibe, serving as symbols aided by the three narrative transformation references: social, political and cultural.

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<sup>1</sup> Firas Al-Sawwah, *The Myth and Meaning. Studies in Mythology and Oriental Religions*, Damascus 1997, p. 8.

The novel reveals the Omani writer's ability to excel and differ from her male counterparts as well as her ability to abbreviate relatively long stages in the history of the novel in the Arab world. As a storyteller of ancient traditions, her narrative is not driven by the intellectual, economic, and social structural changes within the Omani society. As a matter of fact, grandmothers and mothers found in myth a cure to help children fall asleep before their insomnia becomes a habit. This, in turn, made them storytellers of supernatural fairytales to help their children sleep. Fawzia Al-Fahdi specifically weaved this theme into her novel *Hawra Nizwa*. In her discussion about the creation of myth and how it moves from older to younger generation, she said: "After how almost everyone had thought that stories were made for older individuals only, mothers started to adapt such stories to fit the toys, dreams, songs, butterflies and kittens loved by their children. Stories that build and demolish sandcastles and palaces for joy. They would not intimidate or threaten the children with the testaments; instead, they gave the stories a happy, hopeful ending, freeing them from all fears that haunted them throughout the day."<sup>2</sup> There are two types of myths: traditional and contemporary.

First, myth as experienced by ancient societies, "includes history, religion, knowledge, and ethics. It involves history because it tells the story of reverent respectful transcendental beings who are the genesis of everything, which ultimately makes it involve religion. In addition, it involves knowledge because it talks about the origin of creation, from the universe to the institutions created by humans and how they emerged. Finally, myth involves ethics, as it presents -via history, religion, and knowledge- the ideal behavior, which is then revived and brought into existence by preserving the myth and keeping it alive through rituals and rites and ensuring its continuity."<sup>3</sup>

Second, contemporary myth, which is "the simultaneous recording of the human consciousness and unconsciousness. Contemporary myth has taken a slow evolutionary path, during which it resulted in a principle that still needs to be explained despite being applied. This principle assumes that every element from the past still influences the masses in the present in an irresistible way and cannot not be defied by any (logical) objection. Even today, aside from the religious behaviors, rituals and beliefs, we can find behavioral disposition which are neither reasonable nor justifiable, and the only way to interpret them is to investigate in their roots as a living fossil that sustains the continuity."<sup>4</sup>

Based on the two previous concepts of myth, it is concluded that myths are not illogical or unreasonable lies, fallacies, and fabrications, as challenged by some religious trends. In fact, they are rightly so only when considered apart from their historical context and existential role; and if we ignored their time, place, and structures, which are still adapted and remodeled across generations.

The Omani female novelist was able to adapt and employ the elements of the two types of myths in a new creative narrative, based on the principle to avoid separating the

<sup>2</sup> Fawzia Al-Fahdi, *Hawra Nizwa*, Ibrī 2022, pp. 52–53.

<sup>3</sup> Muhammad Ajina, *Encyclopedia of Arab Legends in Pre-Islamic Era and its Significance*, Beirut 1994, p. 35.

<sup>4</sup> Sayyid Mahmoud Al-Qimni, *The Myth and Heritage*, Cairo 1993, p. 21.

format and content of novelistic discourse from its ideological structure in general. This is because, according to Bakhtin on dialogic language, “a novel is the same as language, in the sense that it is a continuous dialogue,” highlighting that “it is a blended genre extending to a wide variety of sources and roots [...]. However, its openness to other genres is not an exclusive feature, but one of its fundamental components.”<sup>5</sup> Since the purpose behind resorting to dialogue is to prove the dialogical dimension in the three novels and the ability of Omani women’s novels to adapt myth in a way that reflects their ideas, opinions, hopes and pains despite their emergence at the beginning of the millennium, I will try in this approach to pay attention to dialogue among the various creative and literary genres that equally contributed to the formation of the myth in all three novels.

I will also trace other mythical novels that somehow influenced the three novels featuring themes as follows:

- *The Death Party* (2009) by Fatma Al-Shidi. This novel tells the story of Amal, a traumatized girl whose father attempted to offer her as a ritual sacrifice to a group of wizards. Despite being killed, she returns from the dead to confront the memories of being knocked unconscious and taken to the cannibalistic wizards for the ritual. The myth of the bewitched girl resorts to anthropomorphism, representation and embodiment as a feature of the mythical expression style.
- *Hawra Nizwa* (2022) by Fawzia Al-Fahdi. This novel addresses the historical events that took place in the historic city of Nizwa, where Jabal Hawra, Al-Nakhla and Falaj were mythicized and got haunted by ghostly creatures. She does not limit her narrative to depict reality, but uses some religious and intellectual perceptions about the origin of the universe.
- *They Are Not Mentioned in Majaz* (2022) by Huda Hamed. In this novel, the great grandmother Buthna Al-Tha’eba, is an author who brings to the present stories from the past through one of her books, which was written in an obsolete language. She presents her book on the basis that she lived through various mythical events and characters who attempted to break the shackles of the palace and its allies. Using the indirect language of mythical discourse, she employs symbolism to conceal the direct meaning of her experiences.

Considering the multiple mythical texts used in the three novels, there are two types of cultural influences. The former is foreign influences, and the latter is Arab influence which, at times, emanates from heritage, and other times, from accomplishments of modern Arabic literary genres.”<sup>6</sup> Further, the Omani novelist has employed such influences in her narratives to produce her narratives using modern novelistic methods and techniques.

<sup>5</sup> Mohamed Al-Qadi et al, *Dictionary of Narratives*, Tunis 2010, p. 204.

<sup>6</sup> Nidal Al-Salih, *Myth in the Contemporary Arabic Novel*, Constantine 2010, pp. 51–52.

## Dialogical Discourse in the Three Novels

How can Bakhtin's usage of dialogism be utilized to interpret myth in Omani women's novels, considering the significant effort and time required? According to Bakhtin, the novel entails thorough reading from the foreword to the substantial portions of the text. Hence, it is necessary to select samples which represent the sporadic mythical elements across all three texts that formulated their structure. Further, it is important, across the three novels, to focus on the narrative containing explicit mythical elements, multiple languages, genres, and voices, and eschew the implicit texts within, given the circumstances and purposes of the study.

### First: Multilingualism

#### A: Thresholds and Reception

While crafting her novel, the Omani novelist did not overlook the intertextuality that connects her work with the readers. She believes that the text's threshold is the key to its reception and understanding, as meanings do not reside solely in the text. Instead, they emerge from the dynamic relationship between the writer, reader and text through analysis, interpretation, reading and criticism.

Based on this, we, as readers, can explore the thresholds used by the three Omani novelists in their texts and how we perceive them. As Nader Kadhim argues, "We say something that the text does not explicitly say or only fleetingly mentions. This overlap between what the texts conveys and what the reader interprets brings to life the act of reading, as Wolfgang Iser suggests, given that the relationship between texts and readers is one of dynamic interaction. Texts are profoundly intertextual, drawing meanings from other texts and, potentially, from the reader as well."<sup>7</sup> This leads us to gaps that need to be filled for the text to fully materialize. The main goal is to achieve a consistent and balanced understanding of the text.

The titles of the three novels are rich with mythical connotations which reflect variant cultures, religions, places, and mental issues. This depicts Omani writers' persistent attempt to revert to myth looking for salvation from their grim reality of marginalization, belittling and male dominance. Each novelist resorted to the archetypes defined by Karl Gustav Jung as images and themes that derive from the collective unconscious such as "death, witch, jinni, mountain, spring, night, netherworld, the deep, grandmother, house, basket, pot, plates, box, valley, cave, tree, etc."<sup>8</sup>

1. The vocabulary used in the title of *The Death Party* (2009) by Fatma Al-Shidi uses oxymoron, juxtaposing "Party", which connotes presence and joy, with "Death", symbolizing absence and sadness. This title reflects a mythical dimension deeply rooted in the Omani culture. According to local beliefs, any individual who die suddenly or from

<sup>7</sup> Nader Khadhim, *Maqamat and Reception*, Beirut 2003, p. 26.

<sup>8</sup> Hanna Abboud, *The Modern Literary Theory and Mythical Criticism*, Damascus 1999, p. 18.

disease, regardless of age or gender, is considered *Mu-Ghayeb*, i.e., signifying a disappearance rather than actual death, where it is believed that they may have been possessed by evil spirits (witchery) under a spell, supposedly alive underground or a distant valley or craggy mountain, where their eventual return is anticipated. Oftentimes, families believed that the deceased were in the clutches of wizards and witches, destined to be their feasts, and that the victim's corpse is merely a trunk of palm trees, not their actual bodies.

Furthermore, an individual who escapes the clutches of wizards and witches often survived with a defective body, but they never return to their families. This myth became a source of inspiration for Omani novelists who are keen to use an element from the mythological cultural repertoire. For example, Mahmoud Al-Rahbi, in his novel *The Trail of the Bewitched* (2010) describes the condition of survivors who escaped being eaten in wizard feasts. He said: "Whoever escapes from being eaten by the wizards and witches will live without senses, wandering the wilderness, across the mountain tops and crevices and under the moonlight, wearing shabby clothes until they die or come down to their senses."<sup>9</sup> It is concluded here in this novel that death is always painful human experience with varying reactions across cultures.

The comment of the publisher on the back cover of *The Death Party* asserts our perspective: "This novel is inspired by ancestral mythological folktale as a general theme drawn from each Omani family that lost a loved one whether naturally or due to illness. These families, traumatized and bereaved, often believe that their deceased loved ones have not passed away but have instead disappeared underground." This myth persists to this day in the Omani society, and it involves denial of death because of shock and intense grieving. Looking back to ancient times, we can conclude that this belief is not unique to Oman; in fact, it appears to have been widespread in ancient Egypt and other civilizations across Latin America. Practices such as mummifying corpses and preserving the personal belongings of the deceased were undertaken in preparation for the return of the soul.

This mythological belief has been prevailed throughout the Omani society, yet it has been understudied. The only comprehensive study conducted in this field so far was by Samir Al-Adawi and others, titled "*Mu-Ghayeb: A Culture-Specific Response to Bereavement in Oman*," which stands as one of the most interesting and rare endeavors.

From this study, I drew several important conclusions:

- The prolonged and complete denial of death following burial and funeral rites in the traditional Omani society.
- The bereaved briefly mourn over the deceased, often in denial of the concept of death, and hold onto hope for the return of their loved one.
- The deceased are believed to leave their grave after burial, go live in a cave, and wander in the farms and streets at night.

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<sup>9</sup> Mahmoud Al-Rahbi, *The Trail of the Bewitched*, Beirut 2010, p. 59.

- The deceased are believed to rejoin their families after breaking the spell cast upon them by wizards casted, or after fighting such evil spirits.
- Physiologically, the prolonged denial of death, expected to harm the mental and physical state of survivors, can be understood as a coping mechanism to mitigate the profound impact of sudden death within traditional Omani society.<sup>10</sup>

2. *They Are Not Mentioned in Majaz* (2022) by Huda Hamed is yet a further insight into the same mythological tradition. The writer was immensely captivated by the myth recounting tales of cannibal wizards. From the peritext on the back cover, we highlight this excerpt: “The dining tables of hungry wizards were prepared, awaiting *Those Not Mentioned in Majaz* – those who became acquainted with the forbidden books of magic, stars, wonder tales, bullfighting, the waterhole buried under sand and the last wills of the dead!” With this peritext, the writer holds a pact with the reader, explicitly declaring their relationship.

Within this nine-line peritext in black – the same color as the title to symbolize rejection – the writer presents to the reading public what the reader will find in the, aiming to create a sense of familiarity. In doing so, the peritext becomes “the bridging gateway between the world and text.”<sup>11</sup> Underneath, there is a short three-line translation: Huda Hamed is a novelist from the Sultanate of Oman. She has authored short story collections and several novels including *Who Counts the Stairs*, *Cinderella of Muscat* and *Our Names*. It seems that the translation is executed by the publisher, which features her name in same color at the top of the cover page. Thus, it is understood that she is a polyphonic novelist. The oppressive discourse against her works published by Dar Al-Adab, imply recognition of her talent-driven narratives.

In addition to publishers, the mythical writings seem to enjoy much popularity and garnered wider interest from cultural institutions. In this context, Bait Al-Zubair Cultural Foundation organized a panel discussion on Hamed’s novel in August 2022, which was attended by dozens of eminent writers and intellectuals.

3. Fawzia Al-Fahdi’s *Hawra Nizwa* (2022). Before delving into the other thresholds in the novel, it is evident from its cover page that the novel is set in the ancient city of Nizwa, a city which holds a historical significance. Nizwa “has long been a hub of knowledge and art, attracting scholars, jurists and historians across Oman, earning it the moniker “Courtyard of Islam” due to its prominence in religious education. Moreover, it has been dubbed as “The Cradle of Arab Dynasty” for being one of the top famous cities in the Greater Arab World. In recognition of its enduring religious, intellectual, literary, and cultural heritage, the Islamic World Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (ICESCO) designated Nizwa as the Capital of Islamic Culture in 2015. Additionally, Nizwa was once the old capital of Oman.”<sup>12</sup> Consequently, the myriad

<sup>10</sup> Samir Al-Adawi, et al, ‘Mu-Ghayeb: A Culture-Specific Response to Bereavement in Oman’, *International Journal of Social Psychiatry* 43 (1997), pp. 144–151.

<sup>11</sup> Mohamed Al-Qadi, et al, *Dictionary of Narratives*, p. 462.

<sup>12</sup> Saif Al-Abri, ‘Nizwa: Core of Islam, Highlands of Arabia, And Visitors Exotic Destination’, *Oman Daily*, 27 June 2019, Viewed 22 March 2023, <<https://www.omandaily.om/ampArticle/44654>>.

historical events that unfolded in Nizwa created a fertile environment for myths of magic and sorcery to flourish.

The titles of the three novels take us to a fascinating world of superstitions and tales of the paranormal realm. “Names are a way to introduce myths because naming something brings it into existence. In mythological beliefs, a name is not merely a linguistic guide; rather, it is the very essence of the entity it represents.”<sup>13</sup>

The myth surrounding names and their connotations remains an Omani mythical belief and is closely related to individual behavior. According to this belief, if a person’s name aligns with their behavior, they will lead a happy life. Conversely, if there is a misalignment, it is believed they will experience a sad life. Hence, the title “Hawra Nizwa” is imbued in connotations extending beyond its direct meanings, guiding the reader to the historical past of the city, and Jebel Hawa which is prominently featured on the cover page as a defining landmark of the Nizwa.

The writer attempted to unveil the link between Nizwa and the mountain known for its stability and prosperity after it had been drifting like a ship out on the sea, as cited in some myths about the creation. Nizwa, tucked into its mountain, is but one aspect of the primordial creation that took place thousands of years ago.

Therefore, it is natural to see its mountain and Jabal Al-Akhdar with its terraced farms occupy a tiny part beneath the cover page; they both set the scene for a series of historical events. Since, according to mythological thought, the name of something embodies its very existence, the name of Jabal Hawra is very ancient and used to name various mountains across Oman. For example, Hawrat Yanqul, a giant mountain in Wilayat Yanqul, Al-Dhahirah Governorate.

In Al-Sharqiyah Governorate, Aseela, Wilayat Jalan Bani Bu Ali, lies another mountain holding the same name, and considered a fabulous natural, historical and touristic landmark in the area. The usage of the name in more than one Omani land suggests its legendary nature.

In fact, the name here serves to introduce the myth. It is evidence of the manifestation of the name and its optimistic nature. Furthermore, it signifies the beginning of creation, a connection to rocks, and the manifestation of the Divine before the advent of Islam.

The three writers connected the parallel texts to the body of their texts for two important reasons. The first reason is personal; it stems from considering thresholds as an appropriate space to express their independence, unique cultural sophistication, intellectualism, and creativity. This marks a notable triumph for female self-awareness as a component of shared consciousness between men and women. The female figure on the cover page of the three novels symbolizes women’s capacity to access paranormal realms, including that of death, the mythical city of Majaz, and the enigmatic Jabal Hawra.

The second reason is technical. The novelists believe that the polyphonic parallel texts can create connections within and beyond the text itself, acting as a bridge between

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<sup>13</sup> Muhammad Ajina, *Encyclopedia of Arab Legends in Pre-Islamic Era and its Significance*, p. 252.

the writer and reader, and the text and the world. The voices of publishers and cultural institutions represents recognition, while endorsements from newspapers and the media signify a reconciliatory voice that seeks to embrace diverse forms of creative writing, regardless of gender.

### B. Analogy

*The Death Party* tells the story of Psychiatrist Amal (*The Disappeared*). As she says: "It describes the people who return from the mythical party or journey of death they do not know, after getting back from the dirty world of the wizards and witchcraft."<sup>14</sup>

She was despised and mocked by her relatives because she was born out of wedlock – a sinful relationship between the Sheikh (her father) and his enslaved maid (her mother). She describes her father as "monster/sheikh/lover/wizard."<sup>15</sup>

She pitifully details her relationship with her mother and how he views them both: "A mother whose honor was violated by a man, who eventually married her after she got pregnant with his child as an unfair compensation to save his reputation."<sup>16</sup> He tried to conceal this fact at any cost. Utterly terrified and determined to make her disappear, he conspired with the village traditional healer "who casts spells on women" (Mu'elim) to possess her through evil means when she was only twelve years old.

Through the text, we catch a glimpse into a chapter of Amal's life – the disappeared girl that spans three locations: the village where she was marginalized and possessed by evil spirits, Bahrain where she studied medicine, experienced love and entered a forbidden marriage, and finally, London, where she devoted herself to understanding the clinical diagnosis of death for years. The three spaces remained deeply attached to her character, and from each space, she created a mythical character including the wizards and the traditional healer in the village, Ahmed her lover and savior in Bahrain and the black cat when she was clinically dead in London. At these levels, dialogism appeared in the multiplicity of languages in terms of characters from one hand and in terms of events and occurrences, from the other hand.

Once again, the myth of disappearance reemerges in this scene which Amal narrates: "I went deep into an underground city, where unconscious naked or nearly naked women, men and children unconscious staggered aimlessly. There were large boiling pots, tender bodies of children slung whole on barbecue grills. It was the most disturbing and traumatic scene of all times – far worse than the scariest movie."<sup>17</sup> The myth of returning to life after death was also common in the ancient Egyptian civilization.

They believed that when they die, their spiritual body continued to exist in the afterlife and had an elaborate set of funerary rituals, such as mummification and Book of the Dead which is placed inside the tombs. They also believed that the soul travels to

<sup>14</sup> Fatma Al-Shidi, *The Death Party*, Beirut 2009, p. 63.

<sup>15</sup> Ibidem, p. 79.

<sup>16</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>17</sup> Ibidem, pp. 56–57.

an ideal world, so they added decorative pictographs such as lions, bulls and lionesses on the walls of their tombs. These myths were successfully used in the film industry.

The writer tries to evoke the Phoenician myth of Adonis and Astarte, which has been successively retold in varied images and names from Greece and elsewhere till this day. She reincarnates Adonis in the character of Amal who is torn between good and evil. Her father represents evil, exactly like Ereshkiga, the Mesopotamian Queen of the Dead who rules the underworld of magic, death, darkness and decay. He was driven by his own desires, starting with his adulterous relationship with her mother, which led to Amal's birth, and ending with his attempt to offer her as a sacrifice to the wizards.

He told them: "This is the last child I will give away to conceal my shame."<sup>18</sup> In contrast, her mother, as another Astarte reincarnated, represents the good. She left no stone unturned in search of her child. The mother said: "Please forgive me, my precious daughter. I know they kidnapped you. I saw you wandering beside me reincarnated in the spirit of a little frog. These criminals always do this. I know that you are going to come back. I left a scar on you so that blood gushes out and the evil spirits no longer want you. We inherited these traditions from our ancestors, and I have seen them firsthand, but I did not expect myself to do it with you – my sweetheart!!

– How great are you, mom! You know everything and protect me from anything."<sup>19</sup>

In the mythical story of Astarte representing the girl's mother, Firas Al-Sawwah, states in his book, *The Mind's First Adventure*: "She returned victoriously to life from the dead with her murdered lover Tammuz (Adonis) and the overwhelming dejection and sadness quickly turned into great happiness."<sup>20</sup>

The asserting language of the mother about love, beauty and good in the first quote resonates with the daughter's language, proving the unconditional love, intimacy and sacrifice the mother can give to her daughter. Their conversations are influenced by myth, which is evident in the usage of primordial dialogistic terminology (spirit, blood, demons, wizard, cursed, ancestors, protect, world, my mother). This, in turn, reveals the genesis of the universe and its relationship with ancient myths as well the manifestation of mythical language and its defining characteristics.

Further, myth is a principal theme in numerous Omani historical writings. Renowned Omani scholar and historian, Nur ad-Din Abd Allah as-Salimi, mentions a similar story in his work *Tuhfat al-A'yan bi-Sirat ahl Uman* (A Masterpiece of Notables in the Biography of Omani People). He says: "An inexplicable and weird event took place in Nizwa, capturing attention of the people during that time. This event was even documented and chronicled in a 66-line poetic piece."<sup>21</sup>

A miracle in Nizwa's village, a marvel of wonders told  
Beyond grasp, a testament for those who turn to God in times of toll

<sup>18</sup> Ibidem, p. 59.

<sup>19</sup> Ibidem, p. 63.

<sup>20</sup> Firas Al-Sawwah, *The Mind's First Adventures. Study in Myths*, Beirut 1988, p. 303.

<sup>21</sup> Abd Allah al-Salimi, *Tuhfat al-A'yan bi-Sirat ahl Uman*, Al-Qahira 1928, pp. 102–106.

Anas, a child of merely six, lay in the Companions' graves,  
 Skeptics pondered, Halim's words, and disbelief in waves  
 Yet, a boy beheld her, amid sheep, with a Bedouin girl near.

There are many mythical themes and events showcasing the multiplicity of languages. Some of which are featured in cinema, medicine, philosophy and economy. Thus, it is possible "to fit into the novel the [languages], literary perspectives and multiple ideologies – the language of expressive genres, professions and social segments (the language of gentlemen, farmers, sellers and peasants). Usual language (gossips, cheerleading parties, maids' jargon, etc.)<sup>22</sup> Can also be incorporated.

Upon closer look to *The Death Party*, it is rich in religious vocabulary, clear in Amal's introspective conversation with herself about her lover, Ahmed, whom she mythologizes: "Please come, let us cry out to the Lord for he is sovereign over my sadness that you remain beside me a candle of joy during my unforeseen days. Come, let me baptize my soul with your voice for death has ravaged my being and sorrows have shattered my dreams at a hand that offered me its own fingers as sails to escape far away, bells of the virgin prayers and the sacred nostalgia." The lexicon is apparently religious (cry out to the Lord, candle, bells for the virgin prayers, and sacred) and associated with Christianity.

She tries to give her lover a mythical role to elevate to "Tiamat, Goddess of the Sea, credited to the creation of the universe, whose body gave rise to creatures, life, nature and mankind."<sup>23</sup> She describes her lover borrowing words from Sumerian myths, claiming that the Tigris and Euphrates originated from him, that he is light, and his voice keeps her alive and immortal. His touch, she claims, is her sail to safety, life, and security. In yet another section, she said: "He sits like the last deity, eyes brimming tears fierier and sweeter than the water of the Tigris and Euphrates or Zamzam. His long black strand of hair run softly over his shoulders and his fingers resemble the minarets of mosques."

The vocabulary she uses is associated with Islam (Zamzam water and minarets of the mosques), much like the Greek mythology that the mankind created himself and in control of the surrounding. He is "the last of deities and the god of sadness."<sup>24</sup> Meanwhile, she attributes to herself some transcendent characteristics, as she says: "I came from a serene, monotonous country – almost boring, like a beautiful, deified woman with sharp features and a tight face."<sup>25</sup>

Oftentimes, she claims that her lover is a prophet. For example, she says: "He surprised me with a miracle that overturned my entire lexicon of determination and perseverance."<sup>26</sup> Though a human being, yet he outshines others with his miracles.

<sup>22</sup> Mikhail Bakhtin, *The Novelistic Discourse*, Egypt 1987, p. 81.

<sup>23</sup> Taha Baqir, *Introduction to the History of Ancient Civilizations*, Beirut 2012, p. 55.

<sup>24</sup> Al-Shidi, *The Death Party*, p. 37.

<sup>25</sup> Ibidem, pp. 102–103.

<sup>26</sup> Ibidem, p. 26.

## Second: Multiplicity of Genres

According to Bakhtin, the openness of the novel towards other expressive genres is considered one of its fundamental elements. He says that “the novel allows us to incorporate all types of expressive genres into its structure, whether literary (tales, poetry, poems, comedies) or extraliterary (behavioral studies, rhetorical, scientific or religious texts, and so on). Theoretically, any expressive genre can be incorporated into the structure of the novel, and it is almost impossible to find one single genre that has never been incorporated in the novel.”<sup>27</sup>

The mythical novel, like other types of novels, inspires other creative expressive genres that contributed to the structural elements of the novel and the myth of Jabal Hawra. In fact, *Hawra Nizwa* embodied several genres including the following:

### 1. Poetry

Poetry has a relative role in the structural fabric of Al-Fahdi’s “*Hawra Nizwa*.” She incorporated a handful of poetic lines by the Omani Poet, Ab Muslim Al-Bahlani who was included, among six other Omani globally influential figures, on the List of the Program of the Fiftieth or Centenary Anniversary of the Important Historical Events and Globally Influential Figures. Hawra, the narrator, said: “It was handpicked apart from all other towering and majestic mountains.

They sow the seeds of life just as much as they composed the poetry about Jabal Hawra while the poetic lines of Abu Muslim Al-Bahlani still echo in my ears:

Distinguish her disappearance until found  
If Hawra departs, heaven may cradle her  
She ascended to the skies, circling the corners of its resplendent glory.

Jabal Hawra has been extolled in numerous poems, chants, and stanzas that praise its grandeur, majesty, and lofty stature. The people have sanctified it as a symbol of their resilient yet benevolent environment. Several poets and historians have commemorated its extensive history, which mirrors tales of sorrow, joy, and pivotal moments in the lives and history of the Nizwa community.

With its unseen and obscured summit, Mount Hor, akin to Mount Cudi, Mount Hira and Mount Sina, serves as a bridge between humans and the sacred. Typically, ‘highness’ is the quality of being sacred and denotes the elevated status of the entity or person being described. The human mind “transcends physical boundaries by conceptualizing a divine being in heaven who coexists and produces other deities possessing comparable supernatural abilities.”<sup>28</sup>

<sup>27</sup> Bakhtin, *The Novelistic Discourse*, p. 88.

<sup>28</sup> Muhammad Himam, ‘The Exercise of Stereotypical Mythical and Absurd Fantasy in Creative Thinking by the Arab Individual’, *Journal of Cultural, Linguistics and Technical Studies* 14 (2020), p. 564.

Al-Bahlani's introduction is regarded as recognition and celebration of its eminence as a space, custodian and social incubator of the locals just like we do with the orphans. In essence, the mythical Jabal Hawra has become integral to the sacred fabric. The connection between the residents of Nizwa and this landmark reflects their faithful association with Mount Hira and Mount Arafat. It is the genesis of all other mountains in Oman and its widely proliferated name is a vivid representation and manifestation of the mythical dimension. Sprawling stone housing were constructed in the slopes with springs and aflaj flowing affluently from the top.

## 2. Autobiography

The writer narrates part of her life and emotions towards this mountain. Born in Nizwa, she is very familiar with the location: "Jabal Hur resembles me during at birth, which occurred after what seemed to be ages of painful labor. The mountain is characterized by Jagged rocks and steep slopes. It has been my eternal companion that I would like to talk to. I tell it stories all the time and we have had some interesting conversations. I begged it not to leave me alone in this wilderness. To tell me about the past it witnessed, so I can tell it about mine, honestly. To share with me its deep dark secrets, when it threw its rocks at the suburbs of Wadi Al-Aq and another stone alongside Al-Hasat Mosque."<sup>29</sup>

The writer skillfully highlights her strong relationship with this mountain. It resembles her in every aspect – birth, youth and adulthood (even with wrinkles). She got close to it. She talked to it when she was alone, begging for help to regain her confidence. They reciprocated their secrets about myths – it told her about the secret of the rock at Hasat Mosque. This rock is located at Al-Hadhfa Village, Nizwa alongside the same mosque, which was surrounded by a mythical tale, circulated among the residents. It goes as follows: "One of the locals, renowned for his deep understanding of the secrets of the universe and its workings, sent his two sons to study classes regularly. One day, one of the sons missed class, and his father punished him.

In defense, the son replied: I know about the secrets of the universe more than you and my teacher. In response, the father challenged the child to demonstrate what he had learned. The child took two sticks of alfalfa plant, climbed a hill, and returned carrying a large rock from the summit. Surprised and concerned that his son might become too proud, the father split the rock into two parts, placed his turban between them, and instructed his son to return it. When the child ascended the hill, the father closed the two halves of the rock while the child was still inside. To this day, nestled beside the ancient mosque, the rock stands as a mythical symbol passed down through generations, underscoring the importance of safeguarding religion against magical practices."

The writer used common language, which is Bakhtin describes as "typically the standard form of spoken and written communication within a specific social group – adopted by the author as the conventional perspective, as the linguistic approach to

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<sup>29</sup> Al-Fahdi, *Hawra Nizwa*, p. 90.

individuals and objects typical for a particular segment of society.”<sup>30</sup> The narrative language exhibits dynamism as it strives to appeal to the stone or mountain to achieve a specific goal – self-protection. The stone and mountain serve as intermediaries between humans and the sacred or divine, believed to possess immortality akin to God. Therefore, we can infer that the writer holds a certain affinity for mythical-based language, as her voice harmonizes with it despite introducing modifications in her social tone.

### Third: Polyphony

Bakhtin considers polyphony an important feature of novelistic discourse: “the different texts are seen as voices with features from their original system, yet they acquired other features once they are incorporated in the novel structure to assume principal role.”<sup>31</sup> We can view the diversity of languages and genres in *They are Not Mentioned in Majaz* as a reflection of a plurality of voices. Al-Hamed utilizes various mythical voices throughout the novel, beginning with the section headings that divide the novel into two parts. The headings in the first section feature voices representing opponents of authority, while those in the second section represent loyalists. The first section explores themes with mythical content related to the half dozen individuals expelled from Majaz, such as:

The swaying eyes, Al-Dhahak’s anecdotes, the formidable boss of the magic, the mercury of the red ants’, in company of the rough man to eternity, *sacrificial goods* eaters, the ugly, and the herbs seller whose body is infested with louses. Each title is associated with a mythical character opposing authorities. Among those supporting authorities are titles like “the poet is scooping from her eyes”, “death talks to the *rimma*”, “Almas licks his blood”, “Sufaira – the lady who captivates the hearts”, and finally, “swimming in a cow’s udder”. In the latter, there is mythological content, involving characters such as Al-Khabbaba, the beloved of Almas, the king’s godfather and senior adviser. Al-Khabbaba was known for bathing in a tub of milk to enhance her beauty and radiance. She once told her friend Sufaira, “Every day, I used to bring a bowl of cow’s milk and immerse myself in it, staying for hours as though swimming in a cow’s udder.”<sup>32</sup>

Here, the writer endeavored to portray another stunningly beautiful figure akin to Cleopatra, namely Al-Khabbaba, who surpassed her peers in attractiveness. According to mythology, the Egyptian Queen Cleopatra bathed in a tub filled with donkeys’ milk.

It was said that 700 jennets (young female donkeys) were needed daily to provide enough milk for her baths, believed to be the secret behind her radiant skin and graceful beauty. Another interesting point, she would dip the sails of her ships in perfume so the scent would drift to Mark Antony before her arrival at Tartus shores. Shakespeare described the scented sails of Cleopatra as: “so perfumed that the winds were lovesick

<sup>30</sup> Bakhtin, *The Novelistic Discourse*, pp. 73–74.

<sup>31</sup> Al-Fahdi, *Hawra Nizwa*, pp. 97–98.

<sup>32</sup> Huda Hamed, *They Are not Mentioned in Majaz*, Beirut 2022, p. 163.

with them." Al-Khabbah emerged as the epitome of beauty and allure, while Grandmother Buthna represented Jamil Buthayna's embodiment of platonic love.

Buthna was meant to go against the tide and stand firm in face of miserable customs and traditions. Being the daughter of army commander in a mythical city, she was raised tough as a woman warrior to uphold his status. Instead, she fell in love with a poet who through his chivalry, fighting, and wrestling with men, transformed her into a docile and submissive woman. When her father and his advisor knew about her affair, the latter cast a spell on her lover and turned him into a horse.

Seeking to rid him of the spell, she left her place for Majaz city where she met with Al-Khabbah who succeeded in breaking the spell and saved him from the wizard. In this context, Buthna symbolizes Buthayna, and the poet symbolizes Jamil. However, the writer cast them brilliantly in a different mythical mold.

### Conclusion

The study highlights the advancements achieved by Omani novelists in terms of narrative depth, social perspectives, and comprehension of the contemporary era's rapid developments. It also underscores the distinctive style of mythical expression found within each novel. Clearly, the multilingualism, polyphony and multiplicity of genre in the three novels were wittingly blended within the bodies and became an element of the discourse and structure.

In *They are Not Mentioned in Majaz*, there are multiple voices of the narrator, while in the other two novels, narration is characterized by multi literary styles where the writer presents internal monologue, stories, flash backs, present and future perspectives all together. It is apparent that the three writers used myth prolifically at all three levels to become one of the styles of storytelling through which each writer can demonstrate their stance on contemporary patriarchal norms.

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