

Exploring The Dynamics of Intertextuality: A Study of Selected Works by Rajā' Ālim

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Abstract

Rajā' Ālim, a distinguished Saudi Arabian author, is often noted for her overtly complex and densely layered use of intertextual references, which renders her writing convoluted and intricate. However, this research argues that despite these criticisms, her intertextual approach ultimately enriches the literary experience, highlighting her significant impact on Saudi and Arabic literature through the lens of intertextuality.

The study explores Ālim's intertextual approach in various genres (novels, short stories, and drama), seamlessly integrating aesthetic and political elements for a captivating and intellectually stimulating reading experience. Through analyzing literary, religious, historical, and mythical references, the research reveals the profound implications of her intertextuality.

The findings demonstrate that intertextuality serves as a powerful tool, expanding the scope of her texts and transcending boundaries, thus placing her work within a larger universal context. It fosters familiarity and connection with established texts, prompting readers to adopt innovative reading approaches that challenge the notion of self-contained literary works. This cultivates a diverse cultural discourse, bridging her work to a timeless and borderless literary heritage, and giving rise to fresh perspectives or commentaries on the role of literature within society, actively participating in pivotal contemporary discussions.

Keywords: Rajā' Ālim, Intertextuality, Saudi women writers, History, Religion, Mythology

1. Introduction

This study conducts a comprehensive analysis of Ālim's literary oeuvre within the context of intertextuality, contributing significantly to current research on Arab authors' use of intertextual elements. The analysis focuses on six carefully chosen texts by Ālim, comprising a play *Al-Raqṣ 'ala Sinn al-Shawka* [Dancing on the Tip of the Thorn] (1987), a short story "Al-Aṣala" [The Python] from her story collection *Nahr al-Ḥayawān* (1994), and four novels: *Faṭma: A Novel of Arabia* (2005), *Khatam* [Ring] (2007), *My Thousand and One Nights: a Novel of Mecca* (2007), and *Ṭawq al-Ḥamām* [The Dove's Necklace] (2010).¹ Despite differences in genre and publication dates, these works collectively showcase Ālim's masterful use of intertextuality, adding depth and richness to her literary endeavors over a span of nearly twenty-three years. The selection of these six texts across multiple genres and time periods is justified by their collective thematic focus on intertextuality. Despite differences in genre and publication dates, all six works prominently feature intertextual elements that enrich their narratives and contribute to a deeper exploration of shared themes in the Saudi and Arabic contexts. By analyzing texts ranging from a play to short stories and novels spanning over two decades, this study underscores the versatility of intertextuality as a narrative tool, allowing for a more comprehensive understanding of how it operates within different literary forms and how it conveys thematic concerns across diverse genres. Additionally, considering works published over two decades emphasizes the enduring relevance and importance of intertextuality in the author's oeuvre, showcasing how Ālim's engagement with intertextuality has the capacity of evolving over time while consistently addressing recurring thematic concerns across various literary forms and historical contexts.

Employing a meticulous textual analysis, the study investigates the intricate links between Ālim's writings and a diverse range of sources, including literary, religious, historical, and mythological texts. By focusing on the aesthetic and political implications of intertextuality within Ālim's works, this research provides both theoretical and practical insights, illuminating its importance as a potent medium for conveying meaning beyond its value as an artistic convention. In the exploration of intertextual dynamics, this scholarly investigation transcends mere identification, moving towards an interrogation of intertextuality as a potent instrument. The analysis discerns that Arabic literary works draw from an extensive reservoir of diverse sources, encompassing the realms of literature, religion, history, and mythology, for the nuanced expression and dissemination of intricate ideas and concepts. This study extends beyond the superficial scrutiny of intertextual presence, adopting a critical lens to discern the resultant synthesis of these intertextual components. It situates this amalgamation within a broader intellectual discourse, thereby examining the ramifications and implications of its usage. Moreover, the study probes how the strategic application of intertextuality in Arabic literature engenders novel perspectives and insightful commentaries

on the role of literature in society. It accentuates that intertextuality serves as an architect of distinct literary paradigms, intricately woven with societal depictions, while concurrently engaging in the discourse of vital contemporary debates.

Previous scholarly inquiries into intertextuality in 'Ālim's work have been limited, with only a few studies examining specific works, such as Intiṣār Monīr's study (2022) of intertextuality in 'Ālim's short story collection *Nahr al-Ḥayawān*, and Mageb al-'Adwāni's investigation (1997) of intertextuality in her novel *Ṭarīq al-Ḥarīr* [The Silk Road]. This comprehensive study distinguishes itself by providing a panoramic view of 'Ālim's adept use of intertextuality across various genres, thus filling a notable research gap in the field.

1.1 'Ālim: Examining the Overlooked Contributions of an Arab Woman Writer

This research also addresses a crucial gap in the study of 'Ālim's distinguished literary productions. Despite winning prestigious awards, her works have been underrepresented in secondary sources and often excluded as primary sources in anthologies and compendiums in both Arabic and English. 'Ālim serves as a representative case study of Arab women writers, who have been marginalized over time, despite their long history of expressing themselves through literature. Scholars like Bouthaina Shā bān (2009), and Seddeka Arebi (1994) have highlighted this issue. By examining 'Ālim's writings and contributions, this research aims to provide an accurate understanding of Arab women writers, challenging prevailing clichés and stereotypes.

Researchers interested in 'Ālim face a scarcity of her primary sources, with many of her books banned or out of print in Arabic countries. In Arabic secondary sources, there is a general lack of scholarship acknowledging 'Ālim's literary worth. For instance, Dr. Ḥassan Bin Ḥijāb al-Ḥāzmi's comprehensive study (2019), on the history of the Saudi short story in the twentieth century, neglects to duly highlight 'Ālim's work. Moreover, Arabic anthologies featuring literary works by Arab writers frequently exclude 'Ālim's contributions, such as the renowned collection of Arab women's stories titled *Kul Ḥādha al-Ṣawt al-Jamīl*, which includes the literary work of numerous Arab women writers but omits 'Ālim's work.

'Ālim's work also faces neglect in anthologies that compile translated stories of Arab writers. Various reputable anthologies exclude the work 'Ālim. Examples include *Contemporary Arab Women Writers: Cultural Expressions in Context*, (Valassopoulos, 2014), *Voices Revealed: Arab Women Novelists 1989-2000* (Sha'abān, 2009), *Under the Naked Sky: Short Stories from the Arab World*, (Johnson-Davies, 2004), *The Anchor Book of Modern Arabic Fiction*, (Johnson-Davies, 2006), *Modern Arabic Fiction* (Jayyusi, 2005), *Opening the Gates: an Anthology of Arab Feminist Writing* (Badran & Cooke, 2004), and *Arab Women Writers: An Anthology of Short Stories* (Cohen-Mor, 2010). Similarly, anthologies that examine literature from Saudi and Arab Gulf states counties such as *Assassination of Light: Modern Saudi Short Stories* (Heinrichsdorff & Bagader, 1990), and *Oranges in the Sun: Short Stories from the Arabian Gulf* (Akers & Bagader, 2008), exclude her work despite focusing on Saudi short stories, a genre that 'Ālim excels at.

This study aims to fill this gap, as it brings awareness about the limited representation of 'Ālim's literary contributions whether in Arabic or English, in both critical assessments and literary compilations, despite her prominence as a writer. Notwithstanding extensive admiration for her originality and linguistic prowess, reviewers and critics often find 'Ālim's work enigmatic, which may contribute to its marginalization. Su ād Al-Manā', an admirer of 'Ālim, admits that 'Ālim's writing: "relies on ambiguity and the interposition of things that spontaneously give rise to secondary meanings and allusions" (2008, p. 273). Al-Manā' labels 'Ālim's style as "complex" accentuating its intertextual nature:

[I]t brings together elements from books on magic and amulets, figures from the *Thousand and One Nights* like Hasan al-Basri, stories from the ancient tradition, Sufi worlds with their mystical numerology and symbolism, and the local folk heritage from the Hijaz, particularly Mecca. (Al-Manā', 2008, p. 262)

While these intertextual sources enhance the richness and complexity of 'Ālim's texts, they can also present challenges for many readers. Critics like 'Āli al-Qurashi and others perceive her works as fragmentary in an unappealing manner, considering them "more intertextual texts" than texts belonging to a specific genre (2005, p. 877). The presence of intertextuality in 'Ālim's work has been unfairly detrimental to its readership. Nevertheless, this study argues that intertextuality enhances the reading experience by forging meaningful connections among diverse literary traditions, religious scriptures, historical particulars, and mythological narratives. Consequently, intertextuality emerges as a valuable, gratifying facet of 'Ālim's writing, and this paper aims to underscore its importance in augmenting the appreciation and comprehension of her literary oeuvre.

1.2 Theoretical Background on Intertextuality

1.2.1 Intertextuality: Definition and Background in Western Scholarly Tradition

Intertextuality, originating from the Latin term *intertexto*, refers to the mixing of ideas from multiple sources and previous texts within a literary work. This ancient literary convention has been recognized by scholars in the Western tradition (Allen, 2011). According to Bertrand Westphal, it can be traced back to Mikhail Bakhtin's work in the 1930s, but it was Julia Kristeva, a French post-structuralist scholar, who developed a comprehensive theoretical framework for intertextuality in 1966 (2001, p. 325). Kristeva's view asserts that texts are not original creations but are influenced by external sources, shifting the focus from intersubjectivity to the interplay between texts and readers, creating a mosaic-like pattern of narratives (1967, p. 66).

Kristeva's exploration of intertextuality was motivated by her effort to synthesize two theories: Ferdinand de Saussure's "semiotics" and Bakhtin's "dialogism." De Saussure highlights the relationship between signifiers and signified, while Bakhtin emphasizes the dynamic dialogue within specific social contexts that leads to the formation of texts. This dialogic nature, as explained by Kristeva, reveals that

texts possess overlapping horizontal (subject-addressee) and vertical (text-context) axes, making each word or text an intersection of multiple words or texts. This realization gave rise to the term "intertextualit e" [intertextuality], coined by Kristeva in 1986 (1967, p. 66).

Various Western scholars offer their interpretations of intertextuality. Gerard Genette, for example, distinguishes transtextuality to refer to all types of textual connections, reserving intertextuality for explicit quotations, allusions, or plagiarism between texts (1982, pp. 1-7). On the other hand, Umberto Eco sees intertextuality as the conviction that every text is interconnected with others in a web of cultural affiliation (1984, p. 20). John Barth views it as an inevitable part of literary production, given that everything has already been said and written (1967, 69 ff). According to Bakhtin, "every utterance is made in the context of (implicit) dialogue, responding to something said before" (1930, p. 54). Additionally, Italo Calvino asserts that writers require other texts to write about their own experiences (1972, pp. 15-16). Linda Hutcheon considers intertextuality in postmodernist terms, demonstrated through pastiche, parody, or ironic quotations (1989, pp. 93-117). Richardson and Wodak define intertextuality as the examination of "how texts draw upon, incorporate, recontextualize and dialogue with other texts" (2009, p. 50).

Poststructuralist critics celebrate intertextuality as it enriches new literary works, appealing to audiences familiar with previously known information and experiences. It serves as a tool for creating overlaps and comprehension among separate texts, enabling authors to infuse their works with subtle meanings and indirect messages (Fabb, 2010). Critics like Roland Barthes (1988), and Savitri Gadavani (2002) support Kristeva's view, arguing that meanings extend beyond a text and are shaped by readers through interactions with previous texts.

Intertextuality manifests through various forms, such as plagiarism, quotation or citation, interpretation, insinuation, pastiche, spoofs, and more, unifying similar literary themes regardless of societal differences (Hallo, 2010). Intertextuality could occur directly (direct references, quotations, allusions), or indirectly (subtle connections or echoes); it could also be conscious (deliberate incorporation) or unconsciously (emerging unintentionally or through the reader's interpretation) (Caiani, 2007, p. 67). Critics emphasize understanding previous texts to comprehend new ones. Intertextuality in this light can occur in three types: compulsory, where knowing the previous text is essential to understanding the meaning of the new one, optional: when knowing the previous text only adds supplementary interpretive layers, and finally, incidental or reader-driven when the connection is constructed by the reader even with the absence of intended links by the author.

1.2.2 Intertextuality in the Arabic Literary Tradition

Although ancient Arabic literary criticism did not investigate intertextuality in its modern form, evidence suggests that intertextuality as a practice existed in the old Arabic literary tradition.  abri H afez confirms this fact (1982, p. 9), and *El Sayed*, as Mohammed Al hus ami quotes him, examines early traces of intertextuality in the works of canonical poets like Imru' al Qaiss, 'Antara Bin Shadd ad, Ka'ab bin Zuh air, and Tarfa bin al-'Abd (2021, p. 1198). Interestingly, some ancient Arab scholars considered literary influence akin to plagiarism, a viewpoint embraced by figures such as Ibn Sin an Al-Khafaji, Ibn  abat iba, and Ibn al-Rash iq (Al hus ami, 2021, p. 1199).

Heinrichs argues that in the Arabic literary tradition, intertextuality has been closely connected with the concept of plagiarism, making it challenging to distinguish between allusion and other forms of intertextuality from the notion of *sariqa*, meaning plagiarism (1998, p. 82). This perspective, as Ma m ud Siahmed argues, is also shared by prominent contemporary Arab critics who have explored intertextuality theory, including 'Abdel Malek Morta a, 'Abdullah al-Gh adami, Mo ammad Mofta , Bashir El Kemary, Mo ammad Bennis,  abri H afez, Sassy Sweidan, and Said Yaq in (2020, p. 7).

Al hus ami presents differing viewpoints on intertextuality, where certain critics, like Al-Jurjani, take a lenient and inclusive approach, abstaining from accusing writers of plagiarism. Al-Jurjani contends that the exhaustive exploration of ideas and images means that any attempt at innovation or creativity will inevitably draw upon previous explorations of similar themes (2021, p. 1198). In a similar vein, 'Abdul Malik Murta  defines intertextuality as the reciprocal exchange of influence and relationships between a literary text and other literary works, underscoring the interconnectedness of literary creations (1991, p. 68).

Modern Arabic literature showcases numerous examples of intertextual literary works. *Frankenstein in Baghdad* (2013) by A mad Sa'ad awi from Iraq draws inspiration from Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*, blending horror and dark humor within a contemporary war-torn Baghdad setting. Kamal Ru hayyim's *Diary of a Jewish Muslim: An Egyptian Novel* (2014) weaves historical elements into the memoir of a Jewish Egyptian who converts to Islam. From Kuwait, Sa'ud Alsanousi's *The Bamboo Stalk* (2012) incorporates themes from Shakespeare's *The Tempest*. Khaled al-Khamissi's *Taxi* (2006), a part of the emerging literary movement known as *al-Riw aya al-Jad ida* [The New Novel] in Egypt, utilizes everyday dialect to narrate the stories of Cairo taxi drivers reflecting on life and politics while referencing canonical works by Ma f uz and al-Hakim, plus famous Western writers. From Egypt also, Ahmad Mur ad's thriller mystery novel *Vertigo* (2007) contains allusions to Hitchcock's works and narrative style. The Saudi writer Laila al-Juhani's novel *Alfirdaws Alyabab* [The Barren Paradise] (2005) is linked to John Milton's *Paradise Lost* in scholarly studies such as that by Bin 'Aq il (2006). Egyptian writer Ra wa 'Ash ur's trilogy *Granada* (2003) intertwines fictional storytelling with references to medieval Islamic texts and events from Arabic history in Andalusia. Wa  ih Gh ali's semi-autobiographical novel *Beer In the Snooker Club* (1964) set in 1950s Cairo includes intertextual references to Western literary works by T.S. Eliot, Ernest Hemingway, and F. Scott Fitzgerald. The Syrian Gh ada al-Samm an's *Beirut Nightmares* (1976) incorporates intertextual references to Naj ib Ma f uz and Khal il Jibr an. The Lybian writer Ibr ahim Al-Kuni's *The Bleeding of the Stone* (1990) integrates elements of Tuareg mythology, oral traditions, Arabic poetry, and magical realism.

In line with the established tradition of intertextuality in Arabic literature, ' alim's selection of six carefully curated works for this analysis exemplifies the diverse and dynamic ways in which texts are interconnected. The aim of this study is twofold: to uncover the diverse

intertextual forms—such as allusion, parody, homage, pastiche, adaptation, and intertextual references—and to elucidate how they reshape perceptions of literature's role in Arabic societies.

The analysis intends to reveal intertextuality's broader implications, which extend beyond the mere literary technique into the realm of politics. By intertwining contemporary concerns with historical echoes, religious and philosophical resonances, mythical ties, and interconnections with other works, the transformative capacity of intertextuality is illuminated.

This contextual approach enriches our understanding of 'Ālim's literary contributions while highlighting how intertextuality serves as a conduit for addressing timely, overlooked, or contested issues. It bridges the literary with the socio-political, fostering a nuanced collective memory and offering a platform for critical engagement with the intricate socio-political landscape of Arabic societies.

Intertextuality takes different forms, and hereby I will provide a summary of each form used in this analysis with examples from Arabic literature to contextualize 'Ālim's work:

Allusion refers to direct or indirect references to other texts, drawing on their authority and creating connections with one's own work. Examples include quoting famous Arabic poetry, myths, historical events, or religious scriptures to add depth and complexity to the texts. In Arabic literature, an example is the title of 'Abdu Khāl's novel *Tarmi bi Sharar* [She Throws Sparks], (2007), which is a direct quotation from the Qur'ān: "Indeed, it throws sparks [as huge] as a fortress" (al-Mursalāt, 77: 32). The novel's macabre and Kafkaesque ambiance aligns with this allusion, creating a harmonious blend between the title and the narrative's mood and events.

Parody is employing satirical and humorous imitations of other texts, styles, or characters to critique the main work, subvert the original, or pay comedic or ironic homage. An example is Emile Ḥabibi's satirical book *The Secret Life of Saeed: The Pessoptimist* (1974), which subverts traditional historical rhetoric to critique occupation and inscribe resistance.

Paying homage refers to honoring another text or author by mimicking their style or alluding to different parts of their work. *The Cairo Trilogy* (1965) by Naguib Maḥfouz pays homage to classical Arabic poetry and historical texts through the characters who quote sayings from renowned poets or historical figures. These intertextual elements engage readers in a dialogue between contemporary fiction and the timeless legacy of Arabic literature and history.

Pastiche is imitating the stylistic techniques, themes, characters, or elements from another work, rewriting it into a new form that celebrates the original text. For instance, Yūsif Zaidān's novel *Azazel* (2008) emulates classical Arabic literature's style while addressing contemporary issues and scientific discoveries.

Adaptation is the transformation of a text influenced by another into a new form, such as turning a written work into a film or theatrical piece. An example is producing the film *The Yaqubian's Building* adapted from 'Alāa' Al-Aswani's novel (2006) of the same name.

Intertextual references refer to borrowing elements from other texts, such as characters, themes, symbols, or motifs. For instance, Ṭayeb Ṣāliḥ's *Season of Migration to the North* (1966) references 'Antara bin Shaddād, a famous poet and warrior from the pre-Islamic era and is believed to also replicate Othello's tragic end and his limbo life between two worlds.

Understanding intertextual references depends on readers' familiarity with the original texts. A single reference can encompass several manifestations of intertextuality, like alluding to religious texts being both an allusion and a homage to their authority. Furthermore, mocking a famous character from another work serves as an intertextual reference and a parody simultaneously.

2. Analysis: Intertextuality in 'Ālim's Selected Texts

2.1 Literary Intertextuality

'Ālim's texts are loaded with references to other literary works, particularly from Arabic and Oriental traditions. Intertextual connections serve as a tribute to the significance of the prior texts, as emphasized by Roger Allen, simultaneously enriching the writer's work by adding multiple layers of meaning (Allen, 2009, p. 1). By drawing on ideas, themes, characters, and styles from other writers, 'Ālim establishes continuity and dialogue with various literary traditions, inviting readers to engage with a wider body of international literature. Furthermore, through intertextuality, 'Ālim can subvert established literary works or conventions, offering pastiche, parody, or alternative interpretations of well-known stories.

The intricate interplay of literary intertextuality in 'Ālim's works elevates the reading experience, rendering it richer and more intellectually invigorating. This creative intertextual approach simultaneously pays homage to literary heritage while providing fresh perspectives on enduring narratives. It extends beyond historical contexts, effectively addressing both universal and local human concerns. These encompass timeless themes, like the cyclical nature of life, resonating across generations, alongside timely and contemporary matters reflecting the current societal pulse, such as the status of women in Saudi society and feminist endeavors towards self-empowerment.

In *My Thousand & One Nights*, 'Ālim draws a literary allusion to Omar Khayym's (1048-1123) *Rubā'iyāt* [Quatrains] poetry, which discusses the cyclical nature of life and the idea of reincarnation through a personified clay vessel.

For in the market-place, one Dusk of Day
I watch'd the Potter thumping his wet Clay:
And with its all obliterated Tongue
It murmur'd-'Gently, Brother, gently, pray!' (1859, n.p.)

Exploring the concept of reincarnation and the cyclical nature of life, Khayyam's poem personifies a clay vessel, imbuing it with a voice and spirit to symbolize the eternal essence within. Similarly, in 'Ālim's narrative, the deceased children of the family who are buried in the household are believed to be reborn as a clan of vessels, carrying their spirits within the clay. "Dumboshi insisted that there would come a day when our [siblings] would be reborn into a clan made of red clay, and from their clay we would fashion vats to cool our water in" ('Ālim & McDonough, p. 81). This intertextual reference pays homage to Khayyam's canonical metaphysical work and reinforces the philosophical and Sufi themes shared by both pieces, exploring the eternity of the human spirit and its ability to reincarnate in various forms.

'Ālim manifests the crucial role that intertextuality plays in connecting key characters from well-known texts. This is evident in her short story "Al-Aṣala" [The Python], where she references *Ḥayy bin Yaqzān*, a medieval Islamic philosophical novel by Ibn Ṭufail (1105 – 1185). Ḥayy's allegorical narrative delves into profound metaphysical and existential ideas, employing symbolic language and mystical teachings. In her adaptation, 'Ālim skilfully rewrites the symbolic style of *Ḥayy bin Yaqzān*, emulates his philosophical debates, and borrows imagery and narrative resemblance from the original story.

The line between 'Ālim's voice and that of Ibn Ṭufail blurs in certain parts, reminiscent of stories within stories seen in literary cycles like *The Arabian Nights*, the Persian *Kalila wa Dimna*, the *Ramayana*, *The Panchatantra*, and the *Epic of Gilgamesh*. Both Ḥayy and the narrator in "Al-Aṣala" find themselves isolated on deserted islands, contemplating the meaning of life. Ḥayy finds himself lonely on a deserted island; he was raised by a gazelle. His solitude was his gateway to reaching the "Truth" by philosophical deductions and reasoning. Ḥayy lives on an: "Indian Island, situated under the Equinoctial, where Men come into the world spontaneously without the help of Father and Mother" (Ibn Tufail, 1929, n.p.). The narrator of 'Ālim also finds herself in the same physical space as Ḥayy, alienated from society, reflecting on life and its implication: "on the land of a deserted island" (1994, 325). The universality of the message suggests that through innate rational faculties, one can attain divinity and grasp the truths of the world, even without human instruction.

It is worth noting that *Ḥayy bin Yaqzān* itself is an intertextual text, adapted from an earlier Arabic philosophical romance by Avicenna. This interconnectedness extends further, as the story of *Ḥayy bin Yaqzān* has been linked to Daniel Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe*, sharing themes of loneliness, self-reliance, religion, and philosophy.

'Ālim's reference to *Ḥayy* serves as a homage to this philosophical text while weaving a creative adaptation with a feminist twist, making the protagonist a woman, thereby empowering her female characters with comparable mental and logical capacities as their male counterparts. The story becomes a pastiche, emulating stylistic and narrative features from *Ḥayy*, evoking a similar reading mood. The power of intertextuality is evident as it connects diverse texts across different historical periods and geographical locations, showcasing the intricate web of literary influence and inspiration.

In conclusion, a text employing literary intertextuality, such as references to Khayyam's philosophical ideas on the cyclical nature of life and the allegorical work of *Ḥayy bin Yaqzān* can significantly impact contemporary Arab readers. By addressing timeless existential concerns, it establishes cultural and historical connections, encouraging philosophical reflection and reimagining the role of literature as a profound vehicle for meaningful dialogue. Additionally, these intertextual references assume heightened significance as they tie into a larger tapestry of intellectual heritage. The inclusion of the allegorical work *Ḥayy bin Yaqzān* allows 'Ālim to employ the feminist twist to the narrative with the female protagonist. This creative choice enhances the text's contemporary relevance by providing a fresh perspective on gender dynamics and women's roles in the context of the cyclical nature of life, thus contributing to a broader discourse on feminism within Arab societies. Such intertextual references not only enrich the reading experience, offering a shared human experience that resonates with the concerns of today's readers but also deepen engagement with Arab identity and literary heritage. Ultimately, the text becomes a conduit for exploring profound life questions within the Arab context, fostering critical thought, and affirming literature's significance in addressing these questions.

2.2 Religious Intertextuality

Besides literary intertextuality, 'Ālim expertly employs religious intertextuality to reveal the intricate tapestry of religious beliefs before and after Islam in the Arabian Peninsula. She weaves a rich fabric with references to pre-Islamic idols and Islamic symbols, such as historical Makkah, the *Ka'aba*, the black stone, and the crescent emblem. This intertextuality significantly impacts the content and interpretation of her works, subtly critiquing patriarchal norms by portraying brave women who defy societal constraints. This portrayal challenges gender distinctions, highlighting the timeless struggle between religious principles and societal norms. In essence, 'Ālim's skillful use of religious intertextuality showcases the richness of religious traditions while underscoring the intricate intersection of religion and the literary imagination in the Arabian context.

In her play *Al-Raqṣ ʿala Sinn al-Shawka* [Dancing on the Tip of the Thorn], 'Ālim employs religious intertextuality to portray a narrator whose age remains fixed at "thirty-three years old" (1987, p. 9), defying the constraints of time. This intertextual reference draws upon the image from "al-Ḥadīth al-Nabawī" [the Sayings of Prophet Mohammad], which states that believers in heaven will experience eternal life in their prime youth at the age of thirty-three: "It was narrated from Mu'aadh ibn Jabal that the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) said: 'The people of Paradise will enter Paradise ... thirty-three years [old]'" (Islam.info, ḥadīth, narrated by al-Tirmidhi, 2545). By referencing this religious text, 'Ālim underscores the central theme of her story: the narrator's quest to break free from all restrictions, including the limitations of time. The fixation on youth symbolizes the preservation of power and agency. The narrator, once a wooden puppet, gains life and embarks on a journey of autonomy and rebellion against her puppeteer. By aligning the age of her

doll-woman with the age of eternal youth mentioned in the religious text, 'Ālim taps into the emotional and psychological resonances that this religious imagery holds for Muslim readers. This use of religious intertextuality bolsters the story's main theme of emancipation and potency, as the narrator emulates the powerful status and timelessness of heavenly dwellers. It is worth mentioning, since this paper explores intertextuality in 'Ālim's play, that it does bear similarities to the children's fantasy novel *The Adventures of Pinocchio*, by Carlo Collodi. 'Ālim's mischievous and daring puppet, like Pinocchio, exhibits a hunger for life. Her play may serve as a feminist adaptation of Pinocchio, with the protagonist being a female character. However, no concrete evidence supports a direct influence of Pinocchio in 'Ālim's work. However, given her background as an English literature graduate with exposure to world literature, the notion of potential influence from a well-known classic (1883), and cultural icon like Pinocchio remains plausible.

In her novel *Khatam* (2007), 'Ālim skillfully employs religious intertextuality to highlight the sacredness of the depicted space in Makkah, crucial for understanding the protagonist's struggle. Khatam, the character, embodies a gender-fluid identity, displaying traits of both male and female. This dual identity causes intense distress within a conservative, religious environment. Coming from a family of six girls and no boys, Khatam experiences pressure to assume a male identity during specific occasions, such as "religious and formal ceremonies" (2007, p. 48), where her father seeks a male heir. However, her dual existence continues as she reverts to her female identity indoors and at school.

In the holy mosque of Makkah, her gender fluidity intensifies. Disguised as a boy, she joins her father "praying with men" ('Ālim, 2007, p. 207), bringing him pride as he presents her as his male heir. During these prayers, the enchanting voice of the Muezzin resonates, and "rises from the marble under her feet, it takes hold of her body and spreads onto her cheeks" ('Ālim, 2007, p. 207). Engulfing her body with divine sensations mixed with intense sensory experiences accentuates the sacredness of the place and deepens Khatam's identity crisis. She realizes that being accepted in the male world requires her to assume a male disguise. Intertextually, the rhythmic and authoritative chanting of the Muezzin reinforces the stability of religious traditions, influencing both the narrative and the spatial setting of the story. 'Ālim's narrative delves into religious intertextuality and gender fluidity within cultural, social, and religious norms. Khatam's experiences adopting a male persona for male-only ceremonies while living as a woman indoors raise profound questions about the origins and existence of gender fluidity, suggesting its presence within various social structures, regardless of their level of conservatism.

In *My Thousand & One Nights*, 'Ālim incorporates religious intertextuality through a popular Islamic belief, where the names of all humans are inscribed in a divine book determining their fate:

This earth of ours receives the sheaves of paper that fall from the Book of Life in Heaven. Whenever a paper falls from that great register, there is a name written on it, and as it falls the letters of the name rearrange themselves to spell Death, and the instant your name-paper hits the ground, a grave opens for you in the cemetery Then there is nothing more to be done except to call on Ezrael, the angel of death. ('Ālim & McDonough 2007, pp. 14-15)

This quotation powerfully showcases religious intertextuality, enriching the novel's theme. By evoking a well-known Islamic belief, it connects the story with the cultural beliefs of Muslim readers. Mentioning the Book of Life in Heaven, where names are inscribed to determine human fate, reflects a significant concept in Islamic tradition. This reference portrays life's ephemeral nature and the inevitability of death, reinforcing the idea of predestination and the supremacy of a higher power as papers fall from the divine register, symbolizing people's impending demise. Mentioning 'Ezrāīl, the angel of death, enhances the religious atmosphere, invoking archetypal unseen messengers of God. Through this religious incorporation, 'Ālim pays homage to Islamic scriptures and symbols, infusing her narrative with sanctity and philosophical contemplation. This quotation aligns with the central theme of religious intertextuality, highlighting the story's connection to the broader cultural and religious context.

In conclusion, 'Ālim's adept use of religious intertextuality in her works signifies her substantial contribution to Arabic literature. By skillfully incorporating Islamic icons, symbols, numerological codes, and allusions to the Qur'ān and Ḥadīth, she pays homage to Islamic scriptures while forging meaningful connections with her narrative and its themes. This interweaving of religious elements enhances the storytelling, adding depth and conveying profound philosophical and contemporary feminist messages. By expertly navigating the realms of faith and literature, 'Ālim solidifies her position as a pioneering author, enriching Arabic literature with a compelling exploration of religious intertextuality.

2.3 Historical Intertextuality

'Ālim's artistic finesse seamlessly incorporates historical intertextuality, not only serving as an homage to the past but also as a powerful tool for creating the stylistic mood of the text. Beyond its thematic resonance, her exploration of intertextuality bears the weight of social responsibility and a feminist duty. By reviving marginalized narratives, particularly the struggles of women and eunuchs consigned to castration for religious service and relegated to the margins of historical discourse, 'Ālim underscores the urgency of inclusive historical representation. This thematic focus harmoniously aligns with her Makkah-centric narratives, where she masterfully intertwines the city's cosmopolitan history across time, from the presence of pre-Islamic deities now vanished to the enduring religious symbols. This interwoven tapestry, serving a dual purpose of homage and illumination, reclaims Makkah's historical identity, is deemed vital for collective memory, and rises to meet the contemporary challenges of the gentrification of the holy city. Works such as *The Dove's Necklace*, *Khatam*, *Ṭarīq al-Ḥarīr*, *Sīdi Waḥdana*, *Ḥubbi*, and the short story collection *The Animal River* exemplify the intertextual tapestry through which 'Ālim skillfully interlaces historical references, ultimately evoking a sense of continuity, immortality, and social

engagement. Amira El-Zein argues that historical intertextuality is not merely an aesthetic literary convention but is dogmatized and utilized by writers to emphasize the power of historical continuity over transient events. This juxtaposition of past and present texts allows authors like 'Ālim to place modern times within a continuous historical series, highlighting the precarious and fleeting nature of time when disconnected from its historical roots (El-Zein, 2011).

In her novel *Khatam*, 'Ālim skillfully incorporates historical intertextuality by referencing the prominent historical figure, Ziryāb (c. 789–c. 857) from medieval Islamic Andalusia. Ziryāb was a renowned singer, lute player, and music teacher in the Umayyad dynasty and Abbasid court. His contributions extended fields as diverse as fashion, cosmetics, culinary art, table etiquette, astronomy, botany, geography, and meteorology. Ziryāb's legacy left a lasting impact, leading to its eponymous designation.

In an astute twist, 'Ālim subverts the revered image of historical Ziryāb, creating a parodic female character with the same name in the novel to carry feminist agendas of equality and self-empowerment. The female version of Ziryāb operates as a singer-prostitute in a seedy brothel located in a "forbidden area" ('Ālim, 2007, p. 67) of Makkah, associated with drugs, prostitution, and destitution. It is in this disreputable setting that the main character, Khatam, interacts with Ziryāb. Disguised as a man, Khatam develops a relationship with the parodic Ziryāb, not only to learn the art of love but also the art of music.

Through this transvestism, Khatam gains the freedom to move between social orders, transcending conventional gender boundaries. She grapples with her identity: "Khatam was confused, she did not know whether she should rebel, and decisively select either masculinity or femininity or surrender more to the blessing of being on both sides" ('Ālim, 2007, p. 58). Yet, Khatam's relationship with Ziryāb opens a window into a world of sensual pleasure and escape, with the brothel becoming her heterotopic haven.

'Ālim employs historical intertextuality to draw parallels and differences between the two characters named Ziryāb, with one performing for royalty in Andalusia and the other singing in a brothel. Despite their disparate contexts, both share a passion for music and living. Ziryāb's relationship with Khatam emphasizes the protagonist's gender fluidity, representing an act of "resistance" against societal gender norms and classifications, as described by Kate Bornstein (2016, pp. 51-52). This intertextual reference highlights the futility of gender-based discrimination, as the protagonist is depicted to perform all the male-expected social duties, masquerading as a man. Thus, the story explores the complexity of the notion of identity, offering a rebellious reading of cultural expectations. Through skillful utilization of historical intertextuality, 'Ālim adeptly conveys thematic messages in her novel. Ziryāb's historical fame serves as a powerful backdrop, allowing the protagonist, Khatam, to embark on a journey of exploration and defiance against societal expectations. Khatam's cross-dressing and interactions with Ziryāb provide her an escape from conventional gender roles and domestic confines, enabling her to embrace music and gain insights into living authentically. The integration of historical intertextuality adds cultural depth to the narrative, facilitating a profound examination of gender identity and societal norms within the compelling framework of *Khatam*.

In *The Dove's Necklace*, 'Ālim skillfully employs historical intertextuality to serve the stylistic aspect of the story, creating an eerie crime fiction atmosphere by drawing on a gruesome murder that took place in the ancient alley of Makkah known as "Abul Rūs" (The many-headed alley). This crime occurred "during the Ottomans' presence in Makkah" or "during the era of one of the sheriffs of Mecca, sheriff 'Oun," and involved the suspension of "four heads of men" in the outskirts of the alley ('Ālim, 2010, p. 9). This calculated intertextual reference adds a mysterious and murky element to the narrative, setting the stage for the detective theme of the novel, where the murder of the protagonist becomes entangled with multiple heads or individuals, implying a complex web of intrigue and suspicion.

The novel not only delves into the history of Makkah but also draws upon the history of Andalusia, evident in the intertextual title borrowed from Ibn al-Ḥazm al-Andalusi's canonical book, *Ṭawq al-Ḥamām* [The Pigeon's Necklace]. This historical document celebrates love as a means to foster tolerance and acceptance among different religions in Andalusia, namely Islam, Christianity, and Judaism ('Ālim 2010, pp. 490-491). 'Ālim's above direct reference to Ibn Hazm's ideology of love mirrors the multicultural coexistence and diversity present in Makkah, a cosmopolitan city where millions of Muslims from various parts of the world coexist harmoniously.

Historical intertextuality is again incorporated in 'Ālim's *The Dove's Necklace*, referencing a marginalized group known as *al-Aghawāt*. Very few studies document the history of *al-Aghawāt*, who were eunuch men castrated by their families to serve the holy mosques in Makkah and Madina. Their career starts at a young age with strict training, including spending seven years near the mosque without leaving, with castration as a fundamental condition for this lifelong monastic service that negated their physical bodies. Though the practice of recruiting *al-Aghawāt* has vanished due to human rights regulations, they had been present as important figures in the holy mosques of Makkah and Madina until the late twentieth century, distinguished by their elegant garments and immaculate appearance, as Aḥmad Al Ḥalabi observes (2022). Through her narrative, 'Ālim offers a rare documentation of this minority group, who served the holy mosque for centuries, living and dying in silence and marginalization. The novel's historical intertextuality sheds light on forgotten aspects of Makkah's past, rescuing disregarded characters from obscurity.

Besides their religious service, *al-Aghawāt* used to keep animals, often having goats and rams. Their stallion ram was known as "Tayss al-Aghawāt," which translates to the ram of *al-Aghawāt*. This ram was lent to owners of livestock to help impregnate their sheep. Over time, the phrase "Tayss al-Aghawāt" became a cultural reference to any man who attracts women due to its association with the ram's virility and appeal.

Drawing on this historical symbolism, 'Ālim skillfully employs the characterization of the ram to describe the playboy character Saleh in the novel. He is nicknamed "Tayss al-Aghawāt" because of his captivating charm and virility. This parodic adaptation by 'Ālim highlights the similarity between Saleh and the ram in terms of their excessive sexual drives, using the animal's traits to portray the human character

in a satirical manner.

In *The Dove's Necklace*, 'Ālim utilizes historical intertextuality to preserve the history of religious spaces and cultural heritage. One significant reference is made to *Hubal*, the pre-Islamic God of the moon, who was highly revered among the ancient Arabs and worshipped around the Ka'abah. The moon sign, part of Hubal's statue, is believed by some folktales to be the origin of the crescent symbol used in Islam today on minarets in mosques and on flags of Islamic countries. The reference to the destruction of Hubal during the Islamic era as a measure against idolatry serves to underscore the prevalence of polytheistic beliefs among the pagan Arabs of Mecca.

Through her protagonist Youssef, 'Ālim presents a magical moment where he stands in the holy mosque, facing the Ka'abah, and imagines the imposing idol of Hubal with the hundreds of other idols that once surrounded it in pre-Islamic eras:

Youssef stood alone, inhaling the night breezes laden with inks, valuable paper, perfumes, and the echoes of the readings that did not remain silent – he stood facing the terrifying idol of Hubal among the idols that were static from the pre-Islamic eras – until he suddenly disappeared from the expansion one night. ('Ālim, 2010, pp. 209-210)

The historical reference to this pre-Islamic God of the moon holds multiple layers of significance. On one hand, it adds depth to the narrative by highlighting the contrast between ancient polytheistic beliefs and the current Islamic setting of the story strictly forbidding and eradicating idols, potentially offering insights into the complexities and underlying tensions surrounding the investigation of the crime in Makkah which involves killing a satanic woman who mirrors the idols that should be eliminated. On the other hand, this allusion aligns with the novel's overarching theme of religious pluralism, diversity, and acceptance. By referencing Hubal, the narrative invites reflection on the coexistence of various belief systems and cultural practices in Makkah's history. It serves as a subtle reminder of the region's rich religious past, fostering a sense of understanding and respect for different faiths and practices within the context of the story.

In conclusion, 'Ālim's skillful utilization of historical intertextuality emerges as a transformative force in enriching her literature. By deftly weaving historical references, figures, and events into her narratives, she not only preserves the past but also breathes life into her stories, offering readers a profound connection to their cultural heritage. Through this interplay between past and present, 'Ālim imparts invaluable insights into individual and collective identities, making her works a timeless source of inspiration and creativity, shaping the Saudi literary landscape for generations to come.

2.4 Mythological Intertextuality

Mythological intertextuality weaves a profound connection between literature and mythology, intertwining them in a rich tapestry of human imagination and storytelling. Myths, with their boundless potential, offer fantastical and paranormal experiences, becoming coveted escapes for both listeners and readers, thereby becoming integral to literary traditions worldwide. Northrop Frye views myths as fundamental "structural organizing principles of literary form" (Frye 2000, p. 341).

In ancient Arabic literature, allusions to myths and legendary beings are plentiful. For example, the esteemed poet Thābet bin Jābir, also recognized as Ta'bbāṭa Sharran (died 607), narrated a supernatural confrontation with the *ghoul*, a legendary creature known to ancient Arabs for its role as a formidable adversary, amidst the barren expanses of the Arabian deserts. Through his poetic compositions, he extolled his courage, vitality, and conquest of this mythical antagonist. *Al-Sa'lat*, identified as the female counterpart of the ghoul, is portrayed as more ferocious and lethal than its male counterpart in historical accounts and poetry of ancient Arabs, and Ta'bbāṭa Sharran boasts about his triumph over her in the desolate Arabian desert.

This prevalence of mythological motifs and archetypes continues to inform and permeate modern Arabic literature, and 'Ālim's works exemplify this phenomenon. By drawing on established myths, she infuses her stories with a sense of magic realism, connecting them to the ancient tradition of oral storytelling and featuring imaginary characters and archetypes that celebrate the fantastic and supernatural. Mythological intertextuality not only weaves a profound connection between literature and mythology but also serves as a powerful tool for offering a feminist reimagining of the role of women in society. One prominent example is the myth of the woman snake, symbolizing women's regenerative abilities and their potential as formidable forces if threatened, challenging the societal classification of women as the weaker sex. This mythological framework, integral to ancient Arabic literature, continues to inform modern works, as demonstrated by 'Ālim's narratives. Through established myths, she infuses her stories with magic realism, connecting them to the rich tradition of oral storytelling, and introducing imaginary characters and archetypes that embrace the fantastic and supernatural, thereby promoting a dynamic and empowering perspective on women's roles.

'Ālim demonstrates her adept use of mythological intertextuality in her short story, "Al-Aṣala" (1994), and in her novel *Fatma: A Story of Arabia* (2002) where she reinterprets the ancient myth surrounding the relationship between serpents and women. This mythical connection also finds expression wherein the serpent is depicted as the central female figure of the narrative. Ancient mythologies across different cultures, such as Greek, Hindu, and Chinese, highlight the connection between women and serpents. In Greek mythology, Athena is often depicted with serpents, while in Hindu mythology, the Goddess Manasa wields power over serpents and life and death. The serpent symbolizes regeneration and healing, aligning with the traditional roles of women as caregivers and nurturers. In Sanskrit, the concept of "Kundalini" represents a female, serpent-like energy at the human spine believed to be released through spiritual practices. In Chinese mythology, the Goddess Nuwa is associated with serpents as the creator of the world and caregiver of its people. In ancient Arabia, women and serpents were revered as sublime, symbolizing the power of life and immortality, given the serpents' ability to shed their skin, and women's procreative attributes (Al-Sudairy, 2013, p. 54). Al-Sudairy posits that the symbolic bond between women and

serpents is historically well-known in the Arabian peninsula: "Woman and serpent together were considered holy in ancient Arabia, since both seemed to embody the power of life. Serpents were considered immortal because of their ability to renew themselves by shedding their old skins, while a woman's procreative attributes made her seem immortal (Al-Sudairy, 2013, p. 54).

The exploration of cyclical reincarnation, symbolized by the mythology of the ouroboros, plays a crucial role in 'Ālim's short story "Al-Aṣāla," where the narrator unexpectedly gives birth to a mystical serpent that fuses with her, forming an ouroboros. This powerful symbol represents an endless cycle of rebirth and renewal, highlighting the eternal nature of life and its transformative power: "[w]hen she sees me, we fuse and unite, her fresh blood pumps me with the energy to enter new cycles, between each of them extends the line of eternity" ('Ālim, 1994, p.18).

This serpentine union symbolizes endless recreation and renewal, which is repeated in the novel, *Fatma*, in which the protagonist embodies a unique fusion of woman and serpent. Her ability to shed her skin signifies power and resilience and highlights Fatma's supernatural attributes akin to ancient mythologies. In *Fatma*, the protagonist undergoes a transformative process after being bitten by a serpent, acquiring magical powers that transcend human limitations:

Fatma's body began to change. She was now able to detect the heat of any approaching body. The dimmer the light happened to be, the more sensitive she was. She would sit still and let her senses locate every object in the house, itemizing them one by one, until finally she reached a state in which her body was able to pass through walls and travel some distance to locate things moving outside. ('Ālim, 2005, p. 38)

In the story, the female protagonist gains extraordinary abilities like sensing approaching bodies and passing through walls. This grants her a divine status akin to ancient mythological goddesses such as the ancient Egyptian Isis and Mesopotamian Inanna. As the queen or goddess of serpents, her transformation into a serpent enhances her with magical powers beyond the constraints imposed by her domineering husband. Al-Sudairy highlights that *Fatma* embodies the historical crisis of marginalized women, and her transformation represents a limitless imagination of a woman-goddess: "Mythology with all its implications is used to bring back an imaginative world," (al-Sudairy, 2013, p. 59) as al-Sudairy argues, allowing 'Ālim to empower her protagonist with agency and elevated status.

In her works, 'Ālim's skilled utilization of mythological intertextuality serves as a powerful tool to offer a feminist perspective, empowering the image of women in society. By adeptly reimagining and recontextualizing ancient narratives, she infuses her stories with profound depth and symbolism, connecting them to universal archetypes of humanity. This artful blend of myth and modernity breathes new life into age-old tales, resonating with contemporary audiences, and enriching her literature with a profound sense of mythical heritage and imaginative storytelling, fostering a strong connection with Middle Eastern cultures while elevating the role of women within the narrative.

3. Conclusion

In conclusion, this comprehensive investigation into 'Ālim's literary works transcends the superficial examination of intertextuality, unveiling its profound potency as a foundational instrument within her narratives. It adeptly orchestrates a refined amalgamation of diverse sources—encompassing literature, religion, history, and mythology—to adroitly articulate intricate thematic objectives. This study moved beyond mere recognition, embracing a meticulous analysis of the resultant intertextual tapestry, positioning it within a broader discourse that critically evaluates both its outcomes and intrinsic significance. The research illuminated how the deliberate infusion of intertextuality in 'Ālim's literary oeuvre not only delivers fresh perspectives and incisive commentaries on the societal role of literature but also deftly constructs distinct literary frameworks for nuanced portrayals of societal nuances. This active engagement with pivotal contemporary discussions and concerns resonates with the transformative power of literature in shaping perceptions, conclusively establishing it as an indispensable and dynamic participant in the ongoing cultural dialogue.

Furthermore, 'Ālim's contributions to intertextuality also showcase the richness and complexity of Arabic literature, cultures, traditions, and beliefs. By exploring themes and characters within broader historical and literary frameworks, she invites readers to delve into the intricacies of human experiences, forging a profound connection with the diverse tapestry of Arabic heritage. In this way, 'Ālim's work serves as a compelling exploration of the multifaceted literature within the region, making a significant impact on the Arabic literary landscape and cementing her position as a visionary writer who shapes the literary landscape by harnessing the enduring power of literature, history, religion, and myths, showcasing their relevance in exploring the complexities of human existence.

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ⁱAll translations from all the Arabic sources used in this paper are mine, unless otherwise indicated.