

Patterns of Representation of the Self in Modern Arabic Autobiographical Writing

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Abstract

It is often maintained that autobiography in Arabic writing lacks a defined status. In light of the elasticity and the wide scope of autobiography to accommodate disparate variety of patterns of the representation of the self, the paper examines examples of diverse patterns of the interpretation of the self in four Arabic autobiographical works: Tawfiq al-Hakim's *Sijn al-Hayah* (1964) (*The Prison of Life*) and *Zahrat al-Hayah* (1975) (*The Flower of Life*), Hisham Sharabi's *al-Jamr wa-al-Ramad: Thikrayyat Muthaqaf Arabi* (1978) (*Embers and Ashes: Memoirs of an Arab Intellectual*) and *Suwar al-Madi* (1988) (*Images of the Past*). In each of the four autobiographical works, the autobiographer's idiosyncratic impulses, peculiar motivations, and contextual factors act as significant determinants of the unique structural conduct and thematic concerns of the work. The final part of the paper provides interpretation for the characteristic tendency of Arab writers of autobiography to write more than one autobiographical work.

Key words: autobiography, diverse, idiosyncrasy, patterns, unique structure.