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RESEARCH ARTICLE

SCIENCE FICTION IN ARABIC LITERATURE: HISTORY, GROWTH, DEVELOPMENT AND POSITION.

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Abstract

Science fiction literature is a somewhat new and less recognized field in the Arabic literary polysystem. The science fiction (SF) genre entered Arabic literature through translations of Western SF works. Nonetheless, we can see elements and sources of SF in classical and folk Arabic literature. In addition, the industrial-technological revolution in the twentieth century served as a catalyst for the growth of this genre.

From the moment it emerged, SF literature faced two types of criticism. The first viewed it as non-canonical, cheap, a sub-category of detective literature, popular and having no value. The second group of critics, diametrically opposed to the first, saw SF fiction as canonical literature that should be engaged with, critiqued and researched.

In recent years, we can see that diametrically literature has begun to establish itself and assume a position in the Arabic literary polysystem. We are witnessing a trend that is changing the approach to diametrically literature and beginning to recognize it as a canonical literary genre accepted by the academic establishment, meriting attention, research and criticism.

Introduction:-

The beginnings of modern Arabic SF can be attributed to two processes. The first is the renaissance of the classical Arabic literary heritage, the "neo-classical movement". This movement originated at the end of the nineteenth century and drew from classical literary genres, imitated them and adopted their writing style—e.g., in the manner of *Maqāma*, the stories of *ʾAlf Layla wa-Layla* (*One Thousand and One Nights*), and classical Abbasid poetry at its peak. The most prominent works of this stream were: Muḥammad al-Muwayliḥlī, Jurjī Zaydān, Ḥāfiẓ ʾIbrāhīm and ʾAḥmad Shawqī. The second stream, which began with the translations of European literature into Arabic and was influenced by it, commenced in the nineteenth century when the Arab and Western worlds reconnected (the accepted date for historians is Napoleon's conquest of Egypt in 1798). Among others, intellectuals from Lebanon and Egypt, who having learned a number of European languages, started translating Western literature into Arabic. Very quickly, Arabic writers began following the styles of the translated works and composing plays, novels and short stories. The first pieces written in Arabic were mainly pale imitations of what existed in French and English. Nevertheless, by the middle of the nineteenth century, writers and playwrights began producing original work in which they engaged in issues relevant to the society in which they lived.

The most prominent writers in this stream who left their mark on modern Arabic literature are: Jubrān Khalīl Jubrān, Michael Nuʿayma, Muṣṭafā al-Manfalūṭī, Muḥammad ʿUthmān Jalāl, Jabrā ʾIbrāhīm Jabrā, Tawfīq al-Ḥakīm and

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Ṭāhā Ḥyssayn. The Arabic novel developed and reached artistic maturity in the work of the Egyptian writer Najīb Maḥfūẓ (winner of the 1988 Noble Prize for Literature), much of which dealt with the world of his native city, Cairo. Maḥfūẓ focused in particular on the lives of the lower classes; yet, he also described the internal world and conflicts of the Egyptian intellectual. His short stories reflect the realism characterizing the lives of many of Cairo's residents. At the same time, his work is suffused with the universal truths of Man's nature.

In the 1940s, SF books and stories began appearing in Arabic literature. SF literature entered Arabic literature through translations of Western SF literature, though some researchers see the roots of Arabic SF drew from classical and folk Arabic literature. Further, SF literature grew and developed under the influence of the industrial-technological revolution, which reached the Arab world in the 1950s.

Definition:-

James Gunn believes that 'defining SF is like measuring the properties of an electron: you may think you're measuring a solid object, but it's really a wispy cloud. Even its name leads to disputes. Jules Verne called what he wrote *voyages extraordinaires*, and H. G. Wells called it *scientific romance*. When Hugo Gernsback created the first true science-fiction magazine in 1926, he called what he intended to publish *scientifiction*, and he came up with the phrase "science fiction" only after he lost control of *Amazing Stories* in 1929 and created *Science Wonder Stories*. Robert A. Heinlein suggested that *speculative fiction* was a more appropriate designation. Abbreviations such as "sci-fi" (liked by the media but not by most fans, who use it to describe bad science-fiction movies) and "SF" (preferred by most readers) further complicate the issue.' (Gunn and Candelaria, 2005: ix)

Samuel R. Delany, insist that, 'like poetry, SF is impossible to define. Others have pointed out that genre titles are booksellers' conveniences, telling them where to put books when they arrive—and equally, of course, book buyers' conveniences, telling them where to look for the books they want when they go shopping. Brian W. Aldiss defined SF as 'a hubris clobbered by nemesis.' John W. Campbell: 'SF is what SF editors publish.' The fall-back position, epitomized by Damon Knight when he said: "SF is what we mean when we point at it," is that we know it when we see it. And even if we can't define it to everyone's satisfaction, the effort helps us clarify our thinking about the genre (quoted in Gunn and Candelaria, 2005: x).

The Oxford English Dictionary defines SF as 'imaginative fiction based on postulated scientific discoveries or spectacular environmental changes, frequently set in the future or on other planets and involving space or time travel'. Adam Roberts sees the terms of this basic dictionary definition are instructive: 'imaginative fiction' differentiates SF from 'realist' fiction, in which there is some attempt at a literary verisimilitude that reproduces the experience of living in the world we recognise as ours (Roberts, 2000: 2). Darko Suvin defined SF as 'a literary genre whose necessary and sufficient conditions are the presence and interaction of estrangement and cognition, and whose main formal device is an imaginative framework alternative to the author's empirical environment.' (Suvin, 1979: 8-9). Damien Broderick concludes that the SF is a 'species of storytelling native to a culture undergoing the epistemic changes implicated in the rise and supercession of technical-industrial modes of production, distribution, consumption and disposal.' (Broderick, 1995: 155)

James Gunn concludes that 'the attempt to define SF, moreover, is like the attempt to measure electrons in another way: you can determine the location but you can't also determine the momentum every attempt changes one or the other. The difficulty with identifying science fiction and proceeding from that to definition is that SF isn't just one thing. It has no recognizable action, like the murder mystery, or recognizable milieu, like the western, or recognizable relationship, like the romance. It is about the future except when it is about the past or the present. It can incorporate all the other genres: one can have a science-fiction detective story, a science-fiction western, a science-fiction romance, and, most commonly, a SF adventure story. It is best characterized by an attitude, and even that is hard to define. It is the literature of change, the literature of anticipation, the literature of the human species, the literature of speculation, and more.' (Gunn and Candelaria, 2005, x- xi).

In Arabic literature research, SF is usually defined as literature that deals with phenomena beyond our everyday reality, given that this literature describes scientific and technological discoveries that have yet to be realized in reality, especially regarding space, time travel, life on other planets and encounters with extraterrestrials. Accordingly, SF is a genre that is concerned with the responses of humans to improvement and progress in the fields of science and technology. The underlying premise of SF literature is the concept of focusing on predicting the future, with the emphasis on possible technological-scientific developments. Hence, we can see that its creators

write of time travel, the likelihood of world war three, the invasion of Earth by extraterrestrials, battles with strange beings, epidemics of dangerous bacteria, the ominous implications of genetic engineering, humans being ruled by robots and machines, etc. (see, e.g., Muṣṭafā, 2007; Wahbī, 1974; Yāsīn, 2008)

The roots of SF in Arabic literature:-
Chronologically, we can delineate five sources that spurred the growth and development of SF literature in the Arab world.

Arabic folk literature:-

Robert Scholes sees 'the tradition that leads to modern SF as a special case of romance. For this tradition always insists upon a radical discontinuity between its world and the world of ordinary human experience. In its simplest and most ancient form this discontinuity is objectified as another world, a different place—Heaven, Hell, Eden, Fairyland, Utopia, the Moon, Atlantis, Lilliput. This radical dislocation between the world of romance and the world of experience has been exploited in different ways. One way has been to suspend the laws of nature in order to give more power to the laws of narrative, which are themselves projections of the human psyche in the form of enacted wishes and fears. These pure enactments are the root of all narrative forms, whether found in "realistic" or "fantastic" matrices.

There is another way to exploit the radical discontinuity between the world of romance and that of experience, and this way emphasizes cognition. The difference can be used to get more vigorous purchase on certain aspects of that very reality which has been set aside in order to generate a romantic cosmos. When romance returns deliberately to confront reality it produces the various form of didactic romance or fabulation that we usually call allegory, satire, fable, parable, and so on— to indicate our recognition that reality is being addressed indirectly through a patently fictional device.

Fabulation, then, is fiction that offers us a world clearly and radically discontinuous from the one we know, yet returns to confront that known world in some cognitive way. Traditionally, it has been a favorite vehicle for religious thinkers, precisely because religions have insisted that there is more to the world than meets the eye, that the common-sense view of reality—"realism"—is incomplete and therefore false.' (Scholes, 2005, 206)

According to a number of Arab researchers (see, e.g., ʿAbd al-Fattāḥ, 1993; Khurshid, 1994; ʿAzzām, 1994), the miracles and the Jinns (genies or spirits) described in *ʾAlf Layla wa-Layla* (see, e.g., *ʾAlf Layla wa-Layla*, 1998, V. 1, 30-35, V. 4, 58, 225) and in folk biographies such as *Sīrat ʾAlī al-Zaibaq* (2004) and *Kitāb al-Tījān fī Mulūk Ḥimyar* by Ibn Hishām (2008) , constitute the basis for modern Arabic SF literature. In other words, the roots of SF are embedded deep in Arabic folklore. Researchers claim that the concept of Jinns (genies) and their actions, the phenomenon of metamorphosis, the adventures of Sinbad, the idea of disappearance/reappearance and other supernatural phenomena are the basis upon which SF literature was constructed and from which it emerged.

These same researchers assert that the use of energy, nuclear power and knowledge of electronics in SF today is equivalent to the stories of the Jinn with supernatural power in folk literature and the dangers and crises faced by Sinbad in his travels and his use of tricks and ruses to escape these dangers. Similarly, the Jinn with his supernatural power—as in his ability to time travel, to organize and wage war—in folk literature is the same as today's hero in SF movies. The researchers claim that the flying carpet that appears in *ʾAlf Layla wa-Layla* (*One Thousand and One Nights*) is the equivalent of a spaceship or modern day airplane; the wondrous teakettle is comparable to an electric lamp; the crystal ball through which the witch sees the world is today's computer; the phenomenon of metamorphosis described in mythology, folklore and *One Thousand and One Nights* by virtue of which an entity (sorcerer, witch) can change its form and become a different being, is seen today in SF stories such as Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*. Shelley's hero, Dr. Frankenstein, takes body parts and pieces of skin from dead people and successfully imbues life into them to create a being. In *One Thousand and One Nights*, the sorcerer changes people into animals (a donkey, dog or cow). Today, in SF films, we see werewolves. We can distinguish other phenomena, which appear in Arabic folk literature, e.g., the ability to disappear that enables the hero to disappear by donning a hat or ring. This theme appears today in SF stories such as H. G. Wells' *The Invisible Man*. And just as the authors of folk stories dived deep into the waters of seas and oceans, described and controlled them, today SF is engaging with the same subjects (see, e.g., Verne, 1998; Sharīf, 1977).

Classical Arabic literature:-

In keeping with the assumption that SF is based, essentially, on imagination, the description of futuristic fictionalized adventures, historical facts taken to imaginary horizons, the development of ideas and existing trends in scientific, technological, economic and artistic fields and their implications for the future of humankind, the presentation of unknown worlds and travel to strange planets, it is easy to distinguish the foundations in the imagination-rich Arabic literature. For example:

a) *Al-Futūḥāt al-Macciyya* Ibn ʾArabī (1165-1240),
b) *ʾĀrāʾfī ʾhl al-Madīna al-Fāḍila* by ʿAbū Naṣr al-Fārābī (870-950),
c) *Risālat al-Ghufrān* by ʿAbū al-ʿAlāʾ al-Maʿarrī (973-1058),
d) *Risālat al-Tawābiʿ wal-Zawābiʿ* by Ibn Shuhayd (992-1058),
e) *Ḥay bin YaqẒān* by Ibn Ṭufayl (1100-1185),
f) *ʿAjāʾib al-Makhlūqāt* by al-Qazwīnī (1208-1283).

Thus, for example, Ibn ʾArabī in his book, *al-Futūḥāt al-Macciyya* (*The Meccan Revelations*), described a world that exists in a sesame seed. His world has people, land, gardens, animals and all types of metal. Anyone can enter this world, move about in it and talk to its people, stones or trees. Ibn ʾArabī also described groups of people with the ability to travel from one place to another at the speed of light. Further, he described the prophet Elijah who can walk on water, cross great distances with only two or three strides and fly in the sky on a flying carpet (Ibn ʾArabī, 1972: 257-261, 265-268; Ibn ʾArabī, 1985: 182-184). Likewise, he portrayed people that can change their form and take on another form and thereafter return to their original form. He also described a holy stone around which people turn, with which they converse, ask it to grant wishes, and give advice and information in all kinds of areas, and it answers them and fulfills their wishes (Ibn ʾArabī, 1972: 267). In addition, Ibn ʾArabī wrote of a sea made of dust, yet having the characteristics of water. The stones are drawn to and connect with each other, on their own, in the way that metal is attracted to a magnet, and in this way a ship is built. People board this ship and travel at the speed of light. These same people can walk on water without sinking (Ibn ʾArabī, 1972: 260-268). The same image appears in modern SF. For example, the same descriptions appear in the novel *al-Sayyid min Ḥaql al-Sabānikh* (1987) (*The Man in the Spinach Field*) by the Egyptian writer Ṣabrī Mūsā, and in the novel *al-Ṭūfān al-ʾAzraq* (1976) (*The Blue Flood*) by the Moroccan writer ʾAḥmad al-Biqālī, as well as other novels. In these novels, the holy stone has been replaced by an electronic brain that people turn to and pose questions and it provides answers and information and helps them solve problems and clarify issues. This same brain contains all human knowledge, thinks and records, prophesizes and predicts people's future, forecasts their illnesses, gives them medicine for their illnesses, explains their feelings to them and teaches them the right way to behave (al-Biqālī, 1976; Mūsā, 1987).

The same theme appears in numerous short stories. For instance, *Ḥub fī al-Qarn al-Wāḥid wal-ʿIshrīn* (1987) (*Love in the Twenty-First Century)* by Raʾūf Waṣfī, his hero turns to the electronic brain and asks it for help and direction in how to cope with problems and issues related to his lover.

It is important to note that the literary researchers, Alexei Panshin and Cory Panshin, noted the similarity between the descriptions in the story by Ibn ʾArabī and the descriptions appearing in Fredric Brown's *What Mad Universe* (1949) and *Waldo* (1942), a short story by Robert Heinlein (Panshin & Panshin, 2005, pp. 219-223).

Brian Stableford sees that 'the concept of a *utopia* or "Ideal State" is linked to religious ideas of Heaven or the Promised Land and to folkloristic ideas like the Isles of the Blessed, but it is essentially a future-historical goal, to be achieved by the active efforts of human beings, not a transcendental goal reserved as a reward for those who follow a particularly virtuous path in life. The term was coined by Thomas More in *Utopia* (Latin edition 1516; trans. 1551). It can be argued that all utopias are SF, in that they are exercises in hypothetical Sociology and political science. Alternatively, it might be argued that only those utopias which embody some notion of scientific advancement qualify as SF.

The scientific imagination first became influential in utopian thinking in the seventeenth century: an awareness of the advancement of scientific knowledge and of the role that science might play in transforming society is very evident in Francis Bacon's *New Atlantis* (1626) and Tommaso Campanella's *City of the Sun* (1637).

It was left to a school of French philosophers during the second half of the eighteenth century to become the first strident champions of the idea that moral and technological progress went hand in hand. L S Mercier's pioneering

euchronian novel, *L'an deux mille quatre cent quarante* (1771) proposed that the perfectibility of mankind was not only possible but inevitable, with the aid of science, mathematics and the mechanical arts.' (Stableford, 1995, 1260)

Other researchers (e.g., Scholes & Rabkin, 1977: 173-174; Hillegas, 1979; James, 2003) see utopian literature as a literary genre upon which SF developed. Utopia was the source of inspiration for many SF writers such as H.G. Wells, Jules Verne, Aldous Huxley, Isaac Asimov, Arthur C. Clarke, Ivan Yefremov, Edward Bellamy, and James Blish. The researchers also noted that many modern SF novels contain utopian elements.

In his book, *ʾĀrāʾ fī ʾAhl al-Madīna al-Fāḍila* (*On the Perfect State*), al-Fārābī tried to describe an ideal utopian state in social, economic and political terms. His state is based on science, wisdom and philosophy, and all its citizens enjoy equal rights, justice and a high standard of living (al-Fārābī, 1998). The same descriptions appear in the novel *al-Sayyid min Ḥaql al-Sabānikh* (1987) (*The Man from the Spinach Field*), by the Egyptian writer Ṣabrī Mūsā. He portrayed a utopian state governed by a team of scientists, and wise and talented men (technocrats). This world has justice and social organization that ensures fair distribution among all its citizens of work, food, lodging and studies. There are no illnesses or wars. There is no crime or punishment. Robots help prepare food and run the households. The government allocates property equitably. Citizens work at jobs they enjoy, that benefit everyone and that leave them free time to dabble in the arts and sciences. The institution of marriage has disappeared. There is a laboratory that produces children from test tubes (in vitro fertilization). The government decides how many children are to be produced, in line with its needs.

Equality is reached through scientific-technological and robotic development that enable a high standard of living. The state laws are clear and guarantee equal rights and obligations for all citizens, and every citizen has the right to express his opinion and has free will when voting.

The industrial-technological revolution:-

An examination of the historical background behind the growth of SF in Arabic literature reveals a link between the industrial-technological revolution and the history of its development. The age of scientific discoveries and social changes fed this literary genre's growth. On the foundations of the scientific and industrial revolution, a number of writers began writing fictional books and stories whose subjects were inspired by scientific ideas and technological inventions. The interest in technological innovations and in subjects related to space and supernatural phenomena increased significantly in the 1950s in the Arab world. The reality of the lack of original literature to supply the demand, literature that would deal appropriately with these types of subjects, led to translations into Arabic. These dealt with the typical subjects of SF such as the existence of life on other planets and the possibility of making contact with them. Western writers, most prominently Arthur C. Clarke and Isaac Asimov, filled the very important role of introducing Arab readers to SF. In this context, their engaging with the link between scientific progress and space research, and the emergence and development of SF should be particularly noted (see, e.g., Asimov, 1960; Asimov, 1964; Asimov, 1979; Asimov, 1980; Clarke, 1973).

The link between the industrial-technological revolution and the literature has been discussed in a number of studies and in several papers translated into Arabic. One book that was translated, received especially broad recognition and made a substantial impact was that written by the Russian critic Valentina Ivashova, *al-Thawra al-Tuknulūjiyya wal-ʾAdab* (1985) (*The Technological Revolution and Literature)*. He dealt with the immense progress in science and technology in different fields and its impact on literature. In addition, its author discussed the tendencies of many writers to deal with the most modern scientific developments and the predictions that anticipated these developments.

At the end of the 1950s and at the beginning of the 1960s, books and papers in Arabic that dealt with the industrial-technological revolution and space began appearing. These increased Arab readers' awareness of SF significantly. Albeit these books focused on science and not literature, they still mentioned science fiction books and the most important SF writers, and included summaries of the most famous Western novels as well as discussions related to the mutual relations between SF and the technological revolution. Thus, for example, Muḥammad ʿAwaḍʾAllāh, in the book *al-Faḍāʾ wa-Shuhub* (1973) (*Space and the Comets*), discussed the relations existing between scientific facts and literature and the writers that take scientific facts and weave them into a literary story.

SF literature itself also entered the literary polysystem of Arabic literature by virtue of Arab writers who had scientific knowledge about space and supernatural phenomena. These people were involved in translating Western

SF books and stories. Later, these same writers began creating original SF literature. Among these are: Raʾūf Waṣfī, Maḥmūd Muṣṭafā and ʾAnīs Manṣūr. The series, *ʾAghrab min al-Khayāl* (*Stranger than What You Could Imagine*), (five volumes) by Rājī ʿInāyat, was the one that succeeded more than any other in making Arabic readers aware of important and modern developments in the field of SF such as miracles, supernatural phenomena, space, theories of time, other civilizations, electronic brains and other essential subjects in SF (see, e.g., ʿInāyat, 1980; ʿInāyat, 19**8**3; ʿInāyat, 1984).

We cannot explain the development of this literature in Arabic without discussing the influence of the features of the period and the changes that occurred in it. Arab researchers agree that the spread of SF literature ensued as a result of the technological progress that reached the urban areas during this period and following the industrial-technological revolution when atomic science and study of space abounded. Further, the application of a number of revolutionary discoveries such as the existence of inherited genes also contributed to the impact of SF literature.

The translation enterprise:-

Translations of Western SF books, short stories etc. were a critical feature in the introduction of the genre into Arabic literature. The translation enterprise of Western SF began in the 1940s. It can be classified into four types:

Translations of short stories:-

At the beginning of the 1960s, short SF stories written by the most important Western writers were translated into Arabic. The translations appeared in Egyptian magazines such *al-Hilāl*, *ʾIbdāʿ*, *al-Fikr al-Muʿāṣir*, *al-Qāhira, al-Jadīd*, Kuwaiti magazines such as *ʿĀlam al-Fikr* and *al-ʿArabī*, and Lebanese magazines such as *al-ʾAdīb* and *al-ʿĀdāb*. The stories of Arthur C. Clarke, Isaac Asimov, Ray Bradbury, Damon Knight, H. G. Wells, Varlin Strongin, Bertram Schindler and others were translated. An examination of the Arabic text, however, shows that some translations were very far from being faithful to the original and that they omitted sentences and even full paragraphs (see, e.g., Asimov, 1978; Bradbury, 1986).

Translations of novels:-

From the beginning of the 1940s, SF novels were translated into Arabic. The first novels to be translated were two of H. G. Wells' books, *The Invisible Man*, which was translated and published in 1940 in Egypt, and *The Food of Gods and How It Came to Earth*, which was translated and published in 1947, also in Egypt (Wells, 1940; Wells, 1947). The latter translation was reprinted in Damascus in 2001. Another famous and important novel that was also translated for the first time in 1956 was George Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, which was actually translated and published six times in the Arab world by six different publishers. Other novels that were translated were those of Arthur C. Clarke, Karel Čapek, Aldous Huxley etc. The translation enterprise continues today. Thus, for example, Clarke's *Rendezvous with Rama* was published in Cairo in 2010.

In parallel, articles and papers appeared in newspapers and journals that dealt with translated novels and other Western literary works. For example, there were papers that discussed and reviewed the novels of Kurt Vonnegut, *Player Piano*, *Cat's Cradle*, and *God Bless You, Mr. Rosewater*, of Roger Zelazny, *This Immortal*, of Ray Bradbury, *Fahrenheit 451*, of Anthony Burgess, *A Clockwork Orange* and *Earthly Powers*, and others, were published.

Translations of scientific books and papers:-

Another element that had a significant role in bringing SF literature into the world of Arabic readers was the translations of papers, research studies and books dealing with this literature, how it emerged, and central schools of thought and writers. Through these studies, Arabic readers became cognizant of the growth and development of SF and to associate SF with the scientific-technological revolution. Likewise, with the exposure to some Western writers and their work, Arabic readers learned about the subjects and content of SF literature and its place in the literary system.

The Strength to Dream: Literature and Imagination (1962) by Colin Wilson is believed to be the first book to be translated into Arabic and it had enormous impact on the entry and diffusion of SF into the Arab world. The first translation of the book appeared in 1966 and was followed by four other editions, the last one in 1981 (Wilson, 1966). Other books that were translated into Arabic and that also had great influence were *Histoire de Roman Moderne* (1962) by René Marill Albérès, translated in 1978, and *La Science-fiction* (1983) by Jean Gattégno, translated in 1990. Translation of books dealing with SF continues today. Thus, in 2011, *Science Fiction and*

Philosophy: From Time Travel to Superintelligence edited by Susan Schneider (2009), was translated in Egypt (Schneider, 2011).

In addition, in the 1980s, scientific papers by top Western critics were translated and published. For example: Robert Scholes, *The Roots of Science Fiction* (1976); Darko Suvin, *On the Poetics of Science Fiction* (1976); Mark R. Hillegas, *The Literary Background to Science Fiction* (1979).

These papers were published in Egypt in the journal *al-Fikr al-Muʿāṣir*, *al-Qāhira, al-Jadīd*. They discussed SF literature, and through them, Arabic readers were exposed to topics such as the history and development of the genre, the link between the genre and the scientific-technological revolution and astrophysics and the relation with other genres such as fantasy, utopia, and life on other planets. Further, these papers also mentioned SF writers and books and included abstracts of famous Westerns novels (see, e.g., Hillegas, 1980; Scholes, 1986).

A close look at Arabic journals today will show that they are still publishing translated articles dealing with SF. For example, in 2007, *Fuṣūl* (71), an Egyptian periodical, published three papers by Veronica Hollinger, Istavan Csicery-Ronay Jr. and Donald M. Hassler.

Anthology translations:-
Another factor that helped introduce SF into the world of Arabic readers was the translation of anthologies that included pieces by Western SF writers and examples of their work. The first anthology to be translated was one edited by Edward Morgan Forster, which was translated in 1961, in Cairo. The second such book was an anthology edited by Robert Silverberg, which was translated in 1986, also in Cairo. This anthology included nine short SF stories that won the Nebula Prize and the biographies of the writers of these stories (Forster, 1961; Silverberg, 1986).

Biographies:-

A pivotal type of text that strongly influenced the entry of SF literature into the Arab world was **biographies**. From the 1960s on, biographies of Western SF authors began appearing in the Arab world, in newspapers and in periodicals. Included among these were biographies of Jules Verne, George Orwell, Aldous Huxley, Ray Bradbury and H. G. Wells, which appeared in journals such as *al-Fikr al-Muʿāṣir*, *al-Jadīd*, *ʿĀlam al-Fikr*, *al-ʿArabī*, *al-ʿĀdāb* and others. Some biographies included short excerpts of the subject's writings as well as reviews of their work. Some of these newspapers and periodicals devoted special columns to the subject of SF literature. These often dealt with a certain book that was presented to the reader and whose main subject matter and content were described briefly. Some of these books were translated afterwards into Arabic (see, e.g., Shar īf, 1975; Sharīf, 1976).

The position of SF literature in the Arab world:-
The 1970s and 1980s were characterized by a gradual shift from being based solely on translated SF to the writing of original texts by Arab authors. An examination of the history of SF shows that this genre, from the moment it emerged, confronted two types of critics. There were critics who called it cheap, popular literature with no value and grouped it with detective novels and non-canonical literature. The second type of critics saw this genre as a form of legitimate literature belonging in the canon and believed that it should be read and critiqued.

The former critics who did not see any redeeming value in SF literature felt that it lacked maturity and reflected an inferior type of writing style. They identified lacuna such as weak and minor plots, underdeveloped characters not delineated sufficiently, a dark and even absurd style, a purposeful appeal to a broad, uneducated public in order to stimulate its senses and imagination and a move away from serious literature and from the noble arts so as to get closer to literature intended to entertain. Other critics, when it first began penetrating the world of Arab literature, also responded negatively. They saw it as a literary genre without value and belonging to the realm of popular literature and detective novels. They even claimed that it was neither scientific nor intellectual. SF novels were accused of not providing enough tools to analyze human behavior and lacking depth and purpose. SF literature was presented, as such, as fit only for entertainment purposes, arousal and making money. As a result, it was considered undeserving of serious research and criticism (Farrāj, 1983; Maḥmūd, 1983; Snir, 2000; Qāsim, 1993; ʿAbd al-Fattāḥ, 1993).

In contrast, the latter group of critics (Sharīf, 1983; al-ʿĀnī, 1986; ʿAbd al-Malik, 1989), described SF as a literary-artistic art form having a universal value that makes it worthy of being related to and seriously evaluated in the same

way that other literature is treated. The assertions of this group of critics were based on the premise that SF has within it a way of thinking that is likely to help humankind solve many of its problems. SF was presented, accordingly, as a literary genre dealing with a number of human issues and that satisfactorily realizes the hopes and aspiration of humankind. Further, it demonstrates the existence of an advanced society, is a means for teaching children and youth values, develops one's imagination, thinking and ability to draw conclusions, and is a warning and a prognosticator of might happen in the future. The position of SF devotees and those who recognized its value has, in the past few years, been supported and accepted by critics and literary agents by virtue of the increase in the number of writers and readers of SF as well as in the number of research studies and papers that have been published on the subject and that included criticism and evaluation.

When it first entered the Arabic literary polysystem, SF was met by disregard on the part of the official establishment and critics. Most research into Arabic linguistics that dealt with Arabic literature ignored the existence of Arabic SF literature. Most anthologies of the world's best SF stories that were published snubbed this literary genre in the Arab world and did not mention Arabic SF authors or give examples of their work (see, e.g., Aldiss & Lundwall, 1986; Asimov et al. 1985 ; Broderick & Di Filippo, 2015; Pringle, 1985).

In the official cultural institutions of the Arab world, the perception that asserts that SF is a type of **cultural invasion** by Western culture predominated and still holds sway today. Critics maintain that this cultural invasion has three main objectives: 1. To undermine the foundations of the Islamic nation and its language; 2. To enable Western culture to supplant Arabic culture; and 3. To prevent the Arab world from rebuilding its real self by ensuring it remains subservient (Snir, 2000).

Despite the scorn heaped on SF literature and the disregard of the critics from the official cultural institutions, we can discern a change in the last few years, which is being expressed by a new tone of respect and esteem SF literature and recognition of it as a serious literary genre worthy of the attention of artists and critics. The official establishment has begun, even if only slowly, to recognize this literary genre as meriting consideration and evaluation as given to other literary genres. Thus, for example, we can find academic research and university papers that discuss this literary genre.

Examples:-

- We can find studies and papers on the subject in the Egyptian journal *ʾIbdāʿ* and *Fuṣūl* (see, e.g., al-ʿAbid, 2007; ʿAbdullāh, 1989; al-Jayyār, 1984; al-Jayyār, 1987; Muṣṭafā, 2007).
- The Syrian journal, *Majallat al-khayāl al al-ʿIlmī* (*The Science Fiction Journal*), has been in print since 2008. It publishes, in addition to SF papers, papers on other topics such as space, physics, chemistry, natural science and more.
- In 2001, a doctoral dissertation at Cairo University.
- In 2007, a doctoral dissertation at the University of Haifa.
- In 200**8**, a graduate thesis at Damascus University in Syria.
- In 2011, a doctoral dissertation at Georgetown University, Washington, DC, USA (Boutz, 2011).
- In 2007, the publication of the book, *al-Khayāl al-ʿIlmī wa-Tanmiyat al-ʾIbdāʿ* (*Science Fiction and the Development of Creation*) (ʾAbū Qūra & Salāmi, 2009).
- In 2009, the publication of the book, *Tanmiyat al-Tafkīr al-ʾIbdāʿī Fī al-ʿUlūm wal-Riyāḍiyyāt bi-ʾIstikhdām al-Khayāl al-ʿIlmī* (*Development of the Work in Sciences and Mathematics through Science Fiction*) (Shawāhīn, et al. 2009).
- Since 1986, six books in Arabic that discussed the development of SF in the Arab world have been published (see, e.g., al-Tallāwī, 1990; al-Shārūnī, 2000).
- At the end of the 1990s, in Egypt, the publication of two series of books aimed at children and adolescents.
- Similarly, we are witnessing a steady increase in the number of writers and readers in the Arab world. For example, in Egypt, we have writers in Arabic such as Ṣabrī Mūsā, Raʾūf Waṣfī, Nihād Sharīf, Muṣṭafā Maḥmūd, in Syria Ṭālibʿimrān, Līnā Kīlānī, Diyāb ʿīd, in Tunisia al-Hādī Thābit, in Algeria Muḥammad Dhīb, in Morocco Muḥammad al-Ḥabābī, ʾAḥmad al-Biqālī, in Kuwait al-Ṭība ʾIbrāhīm, and in Lebanon Qāsim Qāsim.
- We are also seeing Arab authors writing in foreign languages; for example:
- Ebnou, Moussa Ould. (1990). *L'Amour Impossible*. Paris: Éditions L'Harmattan.
- Ebnou, Moussa Ould. (1994). *Barzakh*. Paris: Éditions L'Harmattan.
- In addition, we can find books and papers in foreign languages that discuss SF in the Arab world; for example:

- Barbaro, Ada. (2013) *La fantascienza nella letteratura araba*. Collana: Lingue e Letterature Carocci.
- Snir, Reuven. (2000). The emergence of science fiction in Arabic literature. *Der Islam*, *77*(2), 263-285.
- Snir, Reuven. (2002). Science fiction in Arabic literature: Translation, adaptation, original writing and canonization. *Arabic Language & Literature*, *2*, 209-229.
- Qader, Nasrin. (2002). Fictional testimonies or testimonial fictions: Moussa Ould Ebnou's Barzakh. *Research in African Literatures, 33* (3), 14-31.
- Nuruddin, Yusuf. (2006). Ancient black astronauts and extraterrestrial Jihads: Islamic science fiction as urban mythology. *Socialism and Democracy*, *20*(3), 127-165.

Conferences focusing on SF, its development and position, are also being held; for example:-

- The 1st Science Fiction Conference in the Arab World, Damascus, 2007.
- Science Fiction and Islam Conference, Boston, 2012.
- Science Fiction Conference, Morocco, 2012.
- Science Fiction Conference, London, 2013.

Summary:-

SF is a literary genre concerned with describing fictional futuristic stories in the fields of science, technology, genetic engineering, time travel, life on other planets, encounters with extraterrestrials and their implications for the future of humankind.

SF literature appeared in Arabic at the beginning of the 1940s through translations of Western SF literature. It simultaneously drew from classical and folk Arab literature for its inspiration. Some Arab critics and literary researchers viewed it as non-canonical literature, cheap, popular and worthless, while others saw in it canonical literature deserving consideration and research.

In the last few years, we can discern that SF literature has begun to establish its position in the Arabic literary polysystem. Thus, for example, we can find studies, articles and academic papers that discuss this genre and an increase in the number of writers and readers and serious conferences being held about this genre.

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