

# The Immigrant Critic as a Writer: Spirituality in Mikhail Nu'ayma's *Ayoub* (1967)

Raja Khaleel Al-Khalili

Department of English Language and Literature, The Hashemite University, Jordan

Baker M. Bani-khair

Department of English Language and Literature, The Hashemite University, Jordan

Abdullah K. Shehabat (Corresponding Author)

Department of English Language and Literature, Tafila Technical University, Jordan

Ali Al Nawaiseh

Department of English Language and Literature, Mu'tah University, Jordan

Issam Mostafa Ta'amneh

English Language and Literature Department, Isra University, Jordan

**Abstract**—In the early twentieth century, many Arab American writers who were recent immigrants to the United States considered themselves pioneers with a global vision. Many of them were suffering from feelings of alienation because they came from poor backgrounds and escaped to find that capitalism governs everyday living. Therefore, the main interest of the leading writers was promoting more spirituality in their literary works, especially by those who were writing primarily in Arabic. Nu'ayma who wrote in Arabic wanted to emphasize the importance of following a spiritual path in life in modern-day living in his play *Ayoub*. As a writer and a critic, Nu'ayma believed in the mystical aspects of literature, the power of language, and the importance of literary works in imparting spirituality in society. Living in the United States, he knew many Arab American, Russian, and American critics and writers with whom he shared literary interests and critical thoughts. In Nu'ayma's book *The Ghirbal*, he put forth critical ideas that he believed should govern literary composition. His mystical play, *Ayoub* (1967), was constructed as a literary model that illustrated the importance of rejuvenation in the Arabic language, the significance of mysticism in drama, and the role of literature in transforming society. The following paper traces Mikhail Nu'ayma's critical views in his play, *Ayoub* (1967) and discusses the theme of alienation in relations to Nu'ayma's spiritual outlook.

**Index Terms**—Arab American literature, Mikhail Nu'ayma, spirituality, alienation, capitalism, materialism

## I. INTRODUCTION

Arab American writers are considered a marginal group and some scholars claim that even in the 1980's the scarcity of works on bookshelves was apparent to most Arab American readers (Gabriel, 2001). Nevertheless, as immigrant writers, they contributed to American literary and cultural productions both in the past and the present. At the turn of the current century, the Pen League group changed Arabic writing by bringing to light important critical and cultural insight. In recent times, a group of highbrow writers such as Diana Abu Jaber and Mona Simpson have contributed to a great extent to the Arab American scholarship. We also have influential critics such as the pioneer in postcolonial studies Edward Said. Even though Arab Americans are diverse in terms of people, cultures, and religious practices, they exerted influence in the United States (Layton, 2010, p. 7).

The majority of Arab American writers at the turn of the century have written in English and some also wrote in Arabic and they influenced both their native culture and their new American culture. Mikhail Nu'ayma (whose name is written with variations in English) became one of the most celebrated Arabic poets in America and the Arab world, leading a literary revolution in the way Arabic poetry was composed. The Lebanese-born writer emphasized in his literary works the importance of Arab writers going back to cultural roots and traditions in the composition of poetry in general and Arabic poetry in particular. He had a philosophy that became his drive for writing. In his view, a person who desires a pleasant life should go back to social roots and this philosophy is the path to spiritual fulfillment. Furthermore, in his critical works, the Arab American writer reflected on the spiritual emptiness found in most literary works of Arab writers back home which reflected the stagnation of the Arabic political state at that time. It was the volatile political situation and deteriorated economy in the Arab world that led to the immigration of Arabs to the

United States in the first place. Thus, as a social reformer, he wanted to play a part in addressing the deplorable state of the Arab political scene that led to leaving his home country and finding a solution at least in his writings.

Nu'ayma had his share of problems as an expatriate writer living in a society that did not share his native tongue. Therefore, he started going to sources of empowerment and Nu'ayma encouraged his compatriots to view Arabic as a language that plays a crucial role in achieving spirituality, especially for Arab readers. It seemed the perfect solution because at that time many Arab American writers were experiencing the feeling of purposelessness in a depersonalized society or what Karl Marx referred to as "Alienation." Many Arab American writers who came from impoverished Arab lands came to a capitalist society that imposed immoral conditions on social relationships. From a Marxist interpretation, people living in industrialized modern culture become insecure and practice fetishism in the sense that they cherish what they produce rather than value other human beings and value becomes for them synonymous with materialism. Therefore, Nu'ayma decided to go back to his cultural roots for support which emphasized spirituality as an important thing to lead one's life by.

Nu'ayma's pioneering critical and philosophical ideas influenced many modernist Arabic poets, not only in the United States but also in the Arab world. Some critics attributed Nu'ayma's emphasis on language in promoting spirituality as a result of his status as an immigrant writer (Mohamed, 1999, p. 67). For Nu'ayma, however, the insistence on the use of simple language in all genres was because of his belief that imparting spirituality was intrinsic to literary composition, and many of his works further implemented his ideas on the importance of being mystical, as in his purely spiritual writings, notably *The Book of Mirdad* (1952). As an Arab American social reformer, Nu'ayma wanted to promote a universal vision from his personal experience that focus on the importance of language in promoting spiritual healing for individuals and society.

Nu'ayma was partially successful in promoting his views although many Arab writers of his generation and later generations of Arab American writers shared his enthusiasm for the role of language in promoting spiritual themes in a literary work. The philosophy that language can change realities had been reiterated most recently, by Edward Said who discussed the role of language in constructing realities in "Between Worlds":

Inevitably, this led me to reconsider the notions of writing and language, which I had until then treated as animated by a given text or subject – the history of the novel, for instance, or the idea of narrative as a theme in prose fiction. What concerned me now was how a subject was constituted, how a language could be formed – writing as a construction of realities that served one or another purpose instrumentally. This was the world of power and representations, a world that came into being as a series of decisions made by writers, politicians, and philosophers to suggest or adumbrate one reality and at the same time efface others (Said, 2009).

Because writers were still enthusiastic about their origins and language, many Arab American intellectuals wanted to "demonstrate how their poetic works unremittingly endeavor to eradicate or conceal the gap between language and the reality it purports to embody" (Huri, 2005, p. 7). Thus, many of his contemporaries and later Arab American poets imitated his style, especially in going back to Arabic literary traditions to use as sources for composing a literary text, the need for conveying mystical experiences in literary works, and the importance of using traditional symbols and Arabic poetry in drama.

The play *Ayoub* (1967) carries a religious significance because it refers to the well-known Biblical tale of the prophet Job (known in the Arabic language as Ayoub), and the name of the character is very commonly brought into the daily conversations in Arabic culture to express the need for practicing patience in our lives and lament loss of materialistic possessions. The play relies on the biblical narrative, but it does not retell the story. Instead, the playwright recasts the protagonist as a modern individual undergoing a psychological and spiritual transformation. The play's use of emotive language helped to create a spiritual experience for contemporary audiences. Also, the religious content of the play did not thwart its popularity, and it received moderate success because Arabic spectators at the time of its first performance seemed to accept the performance as a modernized version of the story. The playwright also used theosophy to approximate the spiritual needs of individuals regardless of their religious inclinations and the narrative emphasized that healing from modern materialism required compassion, understanding, and spirituality. Unfortunately, the play did not receive much critical attention afterward and the present research, therefore, attempts to shed light on the importance of the spiritual ideas of the immigrant writer Nu'ayma who was trying to find an answer to the feeling of alienation that was promoted by capitalism. One can detect how his philosophy and criticism shaped his spiritual play, *Ayoub*.

## II. CRITICAL BACKGROUND: NU'AYMA'S *THE GHIRBAL*

Nu'ayma's critical principles for evaluating good literature became guidelines for writers who formed the Arab American literary circle in North America, and Arab writers in the Arab world implemented them in their works. He established, in 1920, with Kahlil Gibran (also written with variations) and other Mahjari writers, the New York Pen League, a school of criticism that changed modern Arabic literature. His most important critical views were gathered in his book, *Al-Ghirbal* (1923). In the book, he condemned the corrupt kind of poetry produced by many Arab writers of his generation. His critical views even today remain a valuable source for many Arab writers; but unfortunately, there aren't any English translations of the book, *Al-Ghirbal*, or the play *Ayoub*. Thus, the excerpts from the *Al-Ghirbal* and also the play that appears in the text were translated by the researcher. In the first part of the critical book, Nu'ayma discussed the role of the poet and the importance of language and spirituality in literary works. In the second half of the

book, he criticized some literary works by famous Arab writers of his time. One of the famous quotes from his book focused on his belief in spirituality, which he believed pervaded modern life and caused alienation:

We are constantly searching for ourselves through everything we say, do or write about. When we search for God, we attempt to find ourselves in God. When we seek beauty, we attempt to find ourselves in the beauty we seek. When we pursue virtue, we only look for ourselves in the pursuit of virtue. When we attempt to find those who are distressed, we are only looking for ourselves in those distressed. When we unlock a secret of nature, we are merely unlocking a secret within ourselves. Whatever man seeks rotates around the same axis that is the man himself (Nu'ayma, *Al-Ghirbal*, p. 125).

*Al-Ghirbal* (which translates into sieve in Arabic) was designed as a book dedicated to laying out a critical approach emphasizing the importance of theme and particularly the idea that a writer must establish a connection with nature. He also emphasized in that book the link between an individual's mental anguish and the unfulfilled materialistic needs which modern society imposes on people. His critical standpoint thus has scientific merit because the relationship between materialism and well-being within the broader context of an individual's value system has been regarded by sociologists as antithetical to well-being (Burroughs, 2002, p. 348). As a critic, Nu'ayma believed that literary writers should portray in their writings the individual as parts of a whole and linked to the universe, and he also considered that writers carry the responsibility of implementing a spiritual existence in their lives and texts.

Nu'ayma, like many writers of his generation, saw that exposing the reading public to criticize materialism which is prevalent in modern society, and to be revolutionary. While there is no direct influence from Eliot on Nu'ayma, we can find echoes of Eliot's poem "The Wasteland," which depicts how modern society is empty spiritually in Nu'ayma's mystical poems. We can also see the influence of Russian writer Belinsky, who inspired Nu'ayma, for example, to revolutionize poetry for social purposes. Also, critics noticed how Tolstoy's version of spiritual freedom was essential in formulating Nu'ayma's critical opinions in *The Ghirbal* (Imangulieva, 2009, p. 124). His extensive reading of other writers from different cultural backgrounds came from his belief that one should be open to the literary and spiritual aspects of great works of world literature. The reason, according to Nu'ayma, was those new ideas and ways of writing stem from an engagement with the past to produce literary works beneficial for individuals living in a world full of uncertainties. According to Nu'ayma, a person should seek to renew, reform, and change in all aspects of life and he was against the common practice of some Arab writers who were blindly following the classical rules of composing poetry without reinventing them. The critic's role, as Nu'ayma sought to highlight, was to evaluate the artistic value of any text. That is the contribution of literary work to the spiritual advancement of society.

According to Nu'ayma, through language, a writer can achieve spiritual development. He questioned the common practices of many Arab writers by using the archaic language of poets of antiquity in their poems; some of those practices, it was found, used to purposefully alienate readers from the Arabic language. Thus, he believed that this method creates a distance between the reader and the writer. According to Nu'ayma, language is a human construct, and therefore, it should be used for the benefit of society. Apparently, Nu'ayma's ideas are even more relevant in drama because, as a performative social art, spectators are exposed to human nature in various situations, such as sadness and anger, and ultimately, a live performance would increase an individual spectator's affinity with a character's predicament in a social context and speed up social reformation.

Nu'ayma, believes that literary texts are verbal utterances that contain worlds of spirit, body, and mind. Therefore, he desired that the Arabic language be kept up-to-date with developments in the social and technological fields because times were changing and, consequently, language and literature should adapt to modern changes. He asserted that the "Arabic language has to accommodate those new advances to maintain its position among other languages and their inevitable influences on the Arabic language and culture" (Naimy, 1976, p. 30). Nu'ayma also maintained that critical importance should be given to the "lucid, sharp, cut, and simple language saturated with poetry" (Naimy, 1976, p. 242). In all of his plays and poems, Nu'ayma sought to implement his critical beliefs concerning language and spirituality in reforming Arab society.

### III. NU'AYMA'S CRITICAL CONCEPTS AS APPLIED IN THE SPIRITUAL PLAY *AYOUB*

The play is an allusion to the biblical story of Ayoub, a narrative known to Arabs Christians and Muslims. He, however, chose to explore this famous biblical narrative from a less dogmatic view and also to endow it with a more spiritual meaning that is not assigned to a specific religion. As a writer and critic, he believed that literature should not create bigotry. Thus, he used a mixture of traditional Arabic and western cultural and literary sources to take the story to a new level of analysis. This method of using multiple sources was imitated by many Arab writers, even those who were not part of the Pen League (Pormann, 2006, p. 4). In his four-act play, *Ayoub*, the writer used the biblical story and specifically the life of the prophet Job (Arabic name Ayoub) to emphasize spirituality and psychological alienation.

The story of the prophet Job (Ayoub in Arabic) appeared in all the monotheistic religions, and many Arabs were acquainted with the prophet's endurance of extreme whose faith was tested by God. As a biblical figure, Job was an example of patience because when God chose to plague him with loss and diseases, he remained faithful. Nu'ayma did not alter the name because the biblical story has a moral and spiritual message, but he gave the play a modern perspective by having other people pose as major characters to offer a more kaleidoscopic picture of the story. Therefore, the casting of Ayoub's daughter as a major character and the invention of other characters were the writer's

version of a more contemporary context. Their role is thus to offer a more comprehensive interpretation of the meaning and role of suffering in achieving spirituality. Through poetic language, Nu'ayma sought to change the well-known biblical story into a philosophical treatise. He also presented a psychological investigation into the hidden recesses of the psyche by allowing spectators to hear the prophet express his feelings. He also altered Ayoub's story to make the audience sympathize with the mixed emotions of faith, patience, and self-doubt that the prophet experienced during his difficult ordeal.

The playwright brought to light the protagonist's anguish and the physical manifestation of the struggle between matter and spirit on stage in a poetical way that was similar to Eliot's portrayal of Becket in *Murder in the Cathedral*. As critics noticed, Eliot's play had some aspects of Buddhism in its recognition of the pain that was associated with human desire (Kearns, 1994, p. 83).

In many ways, both writers had had a spiritual component in their works. Eliot showed the importance of faith and virtue in writing, and this was evident in the audience's reaction to the play, as illustrated by Elizabeth Daumer's article entitled "Blood and Witness: The Reception of *Murder in the Cathedral* in Post-war Germany." According to Daumer, the staging of Eliot's play in Germany at a difficult time shows that religion remains a powerful spiritual healer in crisis. Moreover, Daumer attributed the success of the play to its spiritual themes and also to the way Eliot channeled the inner states of the protagonist and the external environment, which was a factor that led to a positive reaction from the audience (Daumer, 2006, p. 79). The contemporary staging of the play also revealed its significance to modern times, as in the play directed by Martin Browne, who designed a version that wanted to touch on contemporary issues (Davidson, 1992, p. 152). However, the reaction to Eliot's play was similar to the reaction of Arabic audiences to *Ayoub*. The initial interest in both plays with contemporary audiences was a result of the playwright's projection of the inner tensions of the protagonist's spiritual dilemma on stage.

Nu'ayma thus did not seek material gain from staging the play and instead focused on illustrating the method of achieving spirituality through Job's well-known narrative in the Torah. He did not, however, write the story as it appeared in the *Book of Job* about one of the great sufferers in the history of humanity. Instead, he emphasizes that Job understood by addressing publically that his pain was necessary for a new birth which Nu'ayma also explains in the foreword to the play. His intentions to highlight the suffering of the protagonist and to intensify his pains were primarily through his daughter, who came to tell her father of her bad dream. In the play, his daughter approached him, and she incomprehensibly stated that in her dream she witnessed the following:

I do not know! My heart is the size of a mustard seed and in the color of charcoal. Neither is the sun a real sun for me nor is daylight real light; neither is the earth real earth nor in the sky a sky. I am destined never to enjoy any of them at all... I feel as though my soul was fleeing from itself without being able to find a refuge. I feel as though I had a rare gem in my hands, but another hand is about to snatch it out of my hand, I feel as though a thunderbolt would strike me out of the blue clear sky (Nu'ayma, *Ayoub*, p. 22).

Her incoherence made her father impatient because we can detect his spiritual struggle which was evident through his emotive use of language: "Do not ask me an explanation; if only we could explain anything, even what it seems to us as if it does not need any explanation" (Nu'ayma, *Ayoub*, p. 28). Therefore, Ayoub, the fictional character knew that his grief came from his inability to explain to common people his frustrations and this was the reason for his alienation.

However, Nu'ayma departed from the original narrative by showing publically the inner struggles of the protagonist's faith from the perspective of fictional characters that the author invented. In the forward to the play, Nu'ayma explains that Sarhabel, who did not exist in the biblical tale, was the real philosopher who preached the organic unity of the universe and who was consciously raising existential questions such as: "Any sound, picture, or movement is not full of meanings? Even frog-chirping, donkey-braying, the insane delirium of a feverish or insane man, and a grasshopper's leap are not without meaning, but this is only for people who have sense!" (Nu'ayma, *Ayoub*, p. 50) Thus, Sarhabel was the mouthpiece of the author who believed that a logical explanation of events was futile because "There, sir, things that are indescribable and unexplained, but rather that their interpretation spoils them, destroy them" (Nu'ayma, *Ayoub*, p. 51). This strong belief that the world was compromised of wholeness permeated Nu'ayma's philosophy and he used this theory to show how the prophet overcame his pain. According to Nu'ayma, this philosophical interpretation would achieve happiness and cure feelings of alienation. Therefore, the prophet's trust in God, his subjugation, and his final submission was a result of this belief in the wholeness of the universe which helped him gain inner peace. As spectators, we see the truth in Sarhabel who described the universe in this way:

Every single thing in the universe is being woven incessantly, day and night, consciously and unconsciously. Our lives are being woven constantly, Sir, and the knitted fabrics interweave each other; a weaver hither appears later as a weave thither. We weave and we are woven and the universe in its entirety appears suddenly as one enormous loom on which one large weave is strung; you and I and everything else on earth, in the sky or space become the backbone of that single and large weave (Nu'ayma, *Ayoub*, p. 544).

This particular image, which the writer used to portray the relationship between the individual and the universe as part of a whole, was integral to the writer's spiritual thinking. Nu'ayma also used imagery in the play to portray the protagonist's patience, suffering, and ultimately inner peace. He also used vivid images of physical and mental anguish to tap into the spectators' emotions, which would enable them to connect to the theme. Moreover, the simplicity of the words in Arabic captures the intended effect and that is the reason behind his emphasis on literature as a means for

social reformation. At the end of the play, Ayoub admitted that he took some time to comprehend what was happening to him at the end when he raised his hand and eyes towards heaven and said, "I am now subdued" (p. 109). Thus, his falling out was powerful and motivating to spectators because of his sincerity. The other characters realized that worldly needs only lead to more materialism and that the pursuit of materiality would consequently jeopardize peaceful living and forbid spiritual growth. Another lesson that the play showed was the importance of meditation because the protagonist saw solace in every natural object.

As an expatriate writer living in a new and alien environment, he developed a spiritual philosophy by going back to his native origins in the Arabic language and his Christian background. In another important book, *From the Inspiration of Christ* (Min wahi Al Massih), he developed his spiritual ideas and considered his Christian background, which he acquired before coming to the United States, as a positive influence. The religious experience detailed in the book illustrates his road map to salvation. The writer also showed that his contribution was a new reading of the four Gospels. Furthermore, he believed that his journey led him to a better understanding of the life and teachings of Christ. In the book dedicated to Christ, Nu'ayma investigated the many legends surrounding the miraculous portrayal of Jesus. One of these myths was that a prince named Abjar had a terminal illness and, according to the legend, the ailing man was sent to Christ to be cured. Consequently, Christ could not go but wanted to help so he took a handkerchief and wiped his face, and his image was printed on it. The same narrative had another version and in this one, an Apostle gave the picture to an ailing Prince, and this act healed his illness. In one of the accounts, this picture, on its way from Christ to the Prince, passed by a village called "Camoliana", and a pagan woman there witnessed its miraculous healing powers. The mythical tale was an inspiration for many artists to paint the miracles of Christ. Many iconographers tried to visualize and embody the myth in painting, and one of the most famous was the one done by the Russian painter Simon Ushakov in the seventeenth century. Nu'ayma's version, however, was more inclined toward theosophy (Bell, 2002, *Abstract*).

Nu'ayma found religious accounts with their many versions to be inspirational and could serve as literary topics that could resonate with his contemporary readers and spectators, especially as suffering and alienation have become dominant in the modern capitalist world. The playwright believed that for a writer to grasp spirituality, he/she had to engage with a philosophy that denounces materialism. He also projected that it was vital in literary works to confront and fight the decay in society by providing a spiritual alternative to the materialism of the modern world. Thus, the playwright saw that inner peace came from being one with nature. The story of the prophet in the play was a metaphor for the struggles of a modern man who did not understand the connection between faith and the impact it had on the mental and physical health of an individual.

The play portrayed Ayoub in his mental and physical turmoil as a universal symbol of suffering. Healing for the protagonist took place only after he accepted his troubles as physical ones and made peace with the knowledge of his position in the universe. This spiritual outlook offered the protagonist a better coping mechanism and also provided him with the strength to accept the weight of his suffering because it meant worrying less about the transient world. His philosophy is now often practiced by mental health practitioners who introduce spiritual and religious practices in psychological interventions for coping with many difficulties including trauma, e.g. among refugee women (Ozcan et al., 2021; Smigelsky et al., 2017). Furthermore, the terrible experiences and loss seemed to bring Ayoub reassurance that death was not to be feared as the world was an organic whole and individuals had designated roles.

The author used figurative language, paradox, irony, and ambiguity for his transcendent themes and also to enhance the aesthetic quality of the play through language. This emphasis on language was important in eliciting sympathy from the audience. He demonstrated in the play through its simple language that any person, no matter what role he/she occupied, was only a part of a larger existence. As a consequence, readers and spectators should, therefore, build a philosophy of life according to this principle and not feel as if they do not belong. Nu'ayma's determination on the importance of language began when he wanted to reform the Arabic language while living as an expatriate in New York City and wrote profusely in Arabic literary and critical works that worked towards his desired goal of reaching spiritual satisfaction (Skaf, 1985, p. 50).

Nu'ayma's play initially attracted Arab audiences to see the work of the recluse writer. However, it faced some difficulties later on, and nowadays, it is an obscure play. A similar fate faced Eliot's mystical play *Murder in the Cathedral*. According to some critics, *Murder in the Cathedral* was considered a difficult play to stage. Jenny Lewis stated in her article entitled, "From Brain to Breath: Writing Poetry for the Theatre" that the plays of T. S. Eliot, such as *A Murder in the Cathedral*, *The Family Reunion*, and *The Cocktail Party*, were relative successes, but also cited Eliot's confession in *Sacred Wood: Essays on Poetry and Criticism* on the difficulty of providing an appeal to contemporary audiences that saw "the rhetorical aspects of poetry (including blank verse and rhyme)" as a characteristic of making the drama rather "less real" (Lewis, 2009, 26). The lack of commercial success for spiritual plays proved the difficulties of staging plays that are philosophical even though they are important in social reformation.

#### IV. CONCLUSION

Nu'ayma both shaped and shared many beliefs of Arab American writers of his generation at the turn of the twentieth century who found themselves as immigrants in New York City adapting to their new home. The poets were part of a larger community who found themselves in the process of acculturation and also seeking to sustain their Arabic

language as part of their religious and ethnic identity (Cristillo, 132). Nu'ayma, who was considered the theoretician of the group, advocated the importance of maintaining their mother tongue because of its spiritual significance (Naimy, p. 162). As many critics have noticed, Nu'ayma, as a leader of the group, sought poetic freedom so that "the oratorical was to appeal spirit to mind" (Boullata, p. 175). As a leader of the Mahjar Poets, many critics found that he sought to advocate improvements in the working conditions of the marginalized and working classes and the necessity of social and political reform in the Arab nation through literature.

According to Nu'ayma, literary works should benefit society by providing themes that encourage individuals to embrace a more spiritual life and find their place in the universe. As a writer, he believed that literature exerts more influence than politics and that changing society should begin with new ideas in literary works (Bawardi, 68). He often wrote poems that addressed Arabs and many of his nationalistic poems were anthologized and translated into English, such as his poem "Akhi" (My Brother) which addressed political themes especially, the tyranny of the Ottoman rule at the turn of the twentieth century (Orfalea, 1988, p. 59). He was influential in the Arab world even though he did not appear often in the public eye. In his work, he stated that leading a more spiritual existence is a necessary step to achieving wholeness. Furthermore, his insistence on literary and language reform became integral to his social, religious, and political views which solidified his reputation as one of the most influential Arab American writers.

The play was thus a literary contribution that illustrated Nu'ayma's critical thoughts. In the play, he wanted the hardships that Ayoub faced to be a moving spiritual experience for the audience by using the full extent of the emotive in the Arabic language. The major character's simple yet powerful consoling speeches portrayed a more meaningful existence and helped cure his alienation. The playwright used simple vocabulary because he wanted to appeal to every man by showing the importance of genuine emotions. As a critic, he believed that the writer should take the reader on a spiritual experience that liberates the soul to reach wholeness and become one with the universe. As a writer from a Middle Eastern background, both Christian and Islamic religions dominated his philosophy because he believed that spirituality entails more than being a member of a religious belief, and his avid readings also drew him to other faiths and emphasized his views on the importance of spirituality in the lives of individuals. Nu'ayma did not only study Christian theology, but he also loved the language of the Qur'an and admired the way the holy text communicated and attracted people to it. In his views on literature and life, Nu'ayma loved unity, especially the unification of body, soul, and spirit with the charming nature of his home country, Lebanon, which he eventually returned to. He became distinguished as a writer because of the simplicity and clarity of style; in addition to his optimistic attitude, regard for beauty, goodness, and religious piety.

The protagonist's journey in the play was in a way, the Arab American writer's spiritual one which was meant to be a model for the spectator, the writer, and future generations of Arab American writers. Nu'ayma transformed his play, *Ayoub*, a religious text into a literary masterpiece that explores the meaning of spiritual existence and provides stability and strength in life. For Nu'ayma, individuals should not be governed by materialism, especially, as the reason behind immigration for people of his generation were seeking a better place to live. Instead, he proposes through the play's powerful use of language that achieving harmony and happiness can happen only after a person surrenders to the wholeness of the universe.

Nu'ayma's critical and literary works, especially the play *Ayoub*, offer important contributions vital to society and should, therefore, probably receive more critical attention from future scholars. The play illustrates how a writer's native culture and immigrant culture can provide a philosophy of healing and lessen his alienation. His message summarizes his contribution as an individual who brought a personal history of struggle and success in being an Arab American with a religious and spiritual heritage that tied him to humanity and the universe.

#### REFERENCES

- [1] Bawardi, H. (2014). *The making of Arab Americans*. University of Texas Press.
- [2] Bell, G. J. (2002). *Theosophy, romanticism and love in the poetry of Mikhail Naimy*. Ph.D. diss. The University of Pennsylvania.
- [3] Boullata, I. J. (1993). Mikhail Naimy: Poet of meditative vision. *Journal of Arabic Literature*, 24(2), 173-84.
- [4] Burroughs, J. E. and A. Rindfleisch. (2002). Materialism and well-being: A conflicting values perspective. *Journal of Consumer Research*, 29(3), 348-370. <https://doi.org/10.1086/344429>
- [5] Cristillo, L. and L. Minnite. (2002). The changing Arab New York Community. In K. Bensaid & P. Kayal (Eds.), *A community of many worlds: Arab Americans in New York City* (pp.132-133). Syracuse University Press.
- [6] Daumer, E. (2006). Blood and witness: The reception of *Murder in the Cathedral* in post-war Germany." *Comparative Literature Studies*, 43(1-2), 79-99.
- [7] Davidson, C. (1992). *On tradition: Essays on the use and valuation of the past*. The AMS Press.
- [8] Eliot, T. S. (1980). *Murder in the cathedral. The complete poems and plays 1909-1950*. Harcourt, Brace and Company.
- [9] Eliot, T. S. (1939). *The Family Reunion*. Harcourt, Brace and Company.
- [10] Eliot, T.S. (2010). Tradition and the individual talent. In G. McMichael (Ed), *Anthology of American Literature* (pp. 1400-1409). Longman.
- [11] Gabriel, J. (Winter 2001). Emergence of a genre: Reviewing Arab American writers. *Al Jadid*, Vol. 7, no. 34. Retrieved from <https://www.aljadid.com/content/emergence-genre-reviewing-arab-american-writers>, September, 20th, 2022.
- [12] Huri, Y. 2005. "To Flee from all languages": The gap between language and experience in the works of modern Arab Poets. *Arab Studies Quarterly*, 27(4), 1-16.

- [13] Imangulieva, A. (2009). Gibran, Rihani, and Naimy. In R. Thomson (Trans), *East-West Interactions in Early Twentieth-Century Arab Literature* (pp. 124-125). Oxford University Press.
- [14] Kearns, C. (1994.) Religion, literature and society in the work of T. S. Eliot. In D. Moody (Ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to T.S. Eliot* (pp.77-93). Cambridge University Press.
- [15] Layton, R. (2010). *Arab American and Muslim Writers*. Chelsea House.
- [16] Lewis, J. (2009). From Brain to breath: Writing poetry for the Theatre. *Arts and Culture. World Literature Today*, 83(6), 26-28.
- [17] Lodestar, T. (2006). From nostalgia to critique: An overview of Arab American literature.” *MELLUS*, 31(4): 93-114.
- [18] Mohamed, M. I. (1999). The sufi dimension in the poetry of the North American poets and its link to romanticism: Gibran Khalil Gibran, Naseeb Arida, Mikhail Naimy. *Alam Alfikr*, 28(1), 41-76.
- [19] Naimy, N. (1976). *Mikhail Naimy: An Introduction*. American University of Beirut.
- [20] Nu'ayma, M. (1978). *Aba'wa al Bnun (Parents and Sons)*. Noufal.
- [21] Nu'ayma, M. (1972). *Al Ghirbal*. 16<sup>th</sup> Ed. Noufal.
- [22] Nu'ayma, M. (1978). *Ayoub*. Noufal.
- [23] Nu'ayma, M. (1952). *Book of Mirdad*. Dar Beirut.
- [24] Orfalea, G. & S. Elmusa. (1988). *Grape Leaves: A Century of Arab American Poetry*. University of Utah Press.
- [25] Ozcan, O. et al. (2021). Faith and spirituality as psychological coping mechanism among female aid workers: A qualitative study. *Int J Humanitarian Action*, 6(15). <https://doi.org/10.1186/s41018-021-00100-z>
- [26] Pormann, P. (2006). The Arab 'Cultural Awakening (Nahd a)', 1870-1950, and the classical tradition”. *International Journal of the Classical Tradition*, 13(1), 4-20.
- [27] Skaf, M. (1985). Mikhail Naimy as a poet between the critical approach and creative application. *Almarefa*, 24(28), 50-75.
- [28] Said, E. (2009) Between Worlds: Edward Said Makes Sense of his life. *London Review of Books*, 20(9), 7 May 1998. Retrieved from <https://www.lrb.co.uk/the-paper/v20/n09/edward-said/between-worlds>, September, 20th, 2022.
- [29] Smigelsky M., G. A., Foshager D., & Aten J., Im H. (2017). My heart is in his hands: The lived spiritual experiences of Congolese refugee women survivors of sexual violence.” *J Prev Interv Commun*, 45(4), 261–273. Retrieved from <https://doi.org/10.1080/10852352.2016.1197754>, Sep, 20th, 2022.

**Raja Al Khaleel Al-Khalili** is Professor at Hashemite University, Jordan. Her main research interests are in Feminist studies and ethnic diversity in American and English literature. She has authored a book entitled, *The Dialectic of theatrical space and Domestic space: Modern British and American Drama 1900-1939*. The author has also published several papers on Modern and contemporary literature, comparative literature, Arabic literature and gender studies.

**Baker M. Bani-khair** is currently associate professor of English literature at the Hashemite University, Jordan. He has published several articles on different aspects and topics that mainly deal with American and British Literature, cultural studies, and Film. His research interests are varied and multifarious, but he especially focuses on the 19TH Century American novel and poetry, 1960s and 1950s American films, Gothic Literature, culture, and history.

**Abdullah K. Shehabat**, a professor of American Literature and Translation studies at Tafila Technical University. As part of his sabbatical leave expertise in Bahrain, he taught courses in Arabic language for non-native speakers. His major areas of research interest include American literature, postcolonial literature, African American literature and Translation studies. He published a number of papers in internationally recognized journals.

**Ali Al Nawaiseh** is currently an assistant professor teaching at Mutah University. His research interests focus on British and American literature.

**Issam Mostafa Ta'amneh** is Associate Professor in English Language and Translation. He is currently the Head of the Department of English Language and Translation at Isra University, Jordan.