

A Study of Heterogeneity in Jokha AL-Harhi 's Novels

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Abstract

This study employs Mikhail Bakhtin's theory of heteroglossia as its theoretical framework to examine the polyphonic narrative strategies in the works of the distinguished Omani novelist Jokha Alharthi. Acclaimed for her award-winning novel *Celestial Bodies*, Alharthi has emerged as a pivotal voice in contemporary Arabic literature. This paper argues that her fiction is characterized by a pronounced dialogic and polyphonic structure, which mirrors the linguistic and ideological plurality of Omani society through the seamless integration of diverse speech genres, including proverbs, classical and modern poetry, and intertextual allusions. Such richly layered discursive practices not only enhance the narrative's aesthetic texture but also articulate the distinct linguistic features and value systems inherent to characters from varied social strata. To investigate this, the research addresses two core questions: First, how is heteroglossia formally manifested within Alharthi's narrative texts? Second, how does this linguistic diversity convey broader socio-cultural and humanistic meanings? Utilizing a qualitative, descriptive-analytical approach, this study conducts a close reading of four of Alharthi's novels, treating embedded genres as primary analytical material to systematically decode the mechanisms of heteroglossia. The aim is to demonstrate that Alharthi's heteroglossic writing serves as a critical lens for understanding the multicultural constitution and historical complexity of contemporary Oman, thereby contributing to scholarly dialogue in the fields of Arabic fiction studies, Bakhtinian discourse analysis, and the representation of social stratification in postcolonial literature.

Keywords: *Jokha AL-Harhi ; Oman Novels ; Heterogeneity ; Bakhtin Theory.*

RESEARCH BACKGROUND

Jokha Alharthi is a distinguished figure in contemporary Omani and Arabic literature. Her international breakthrough came in 2019 when the English translation of her novel, *Celestial Bodies*, was awarded the Man Booker International Prize, marking her as the first Arabic-language author to receive this prestigious accolade. This milestone has not only elevated Alharthi's global stature but has also catalyzed a renewed scholarly interest in Omani literature—a field historically relegated to the margins (Ahmed, 2023). Consequently, her success has prompted a critical reexamination of the intersections between traditional Arabic narrative forms and modernist literary techniques.

In works such as *Manamat*, *Celestial Bodies*, *The Bitter Orange Tree*, and *Silk and Gazelles*, Alharthi captures the cultural pluralism and structural intricacies of Omani society amidst its historical transitions with remarkable nuance. Her narrative craft deliberately transcends the constraints of the traditional omniscient narrator. By employing polyphonic and dialogic structures, she elevates her characters to an ontological status equal to that of the author. This allows each protagonist to articulate an independent perspective and a subjectively

grounded ideological stance through their unique linguistic register—a creative strategy that aligns profoundly with Mikhail Bakhtin’s theory of the "polyphonic novel."

Furthermore, Alharthi’s novels exhibit a pronounced linguistic hybridity, specifically manifested in the fusion of diverse genres—ranging from Arabic proverbs and oral tradition to classical and modern poetry, folk tales, historical allusions, and ethnographic descriptions of everyday customs. This stylistic strategy does more than endow the text with aesthetic density; it profoundly delineates the socio-cultural fissures among characters of disparate social classes, educational backgrounds, and identities. Such a characteristic aligns seamlessly with Mikhail Bakhtin’s theoretical exposition on heteroglossia (*raznorechie*).

In *The Dialogic Imagination* (1981), Bakhtin asserts that linguistic diversity within the novel is not merely a coexistence of different languages or dialects. More crucially, it involves the embedding of "social languages"—that is, "discourse types differentiated according to social status, profession, generation, class, region, and so on." These stratified discourses represent the "manifestation within language of different social perspectives, ideologies, and value systems" (Qin, 2011). Tzvetan Todorov once lauded Bakhtin as "the greatest literary theorist of the twentieth century" (Todorov, 1981, p. 7). Indeed, "heteroglossia," as one of Bakhtin’s seminal concepts, captures the inherent tension, interaction, and dialogic resonance among multiple social voices within a singular narrative space.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Scholarly discourse regarding heteroglossia in Alharthi’s oeuvre has predominantly converged on two focal points: first, intrinsic textual analyses of her novels; and second, the broader application of Bakhtinian theories of heteroglossia and polyphony within the landscape of contemporary Arabic fiction. The current state of research can be synthesized as follows:

I. Academic Scholarship on Jokha Alharthi’s Fiction

Jokha Alharthi’s works—most notably her seminal novel *Celestial Bodies* (2010), the first Arabic-language recipient of the International Booker Prize—have become canonical texts within the study of Omani and contemporary Arabic literature. As her bibliography gains wider circulation through ongoing translation, scholarly attention has increasingly extended to her earlier and subsequent works, including *Manamat* (2004), *The Bitter Orange Tree* (2016), and *Silk and Gazelles* (2021).

Existing scholarship generally unfolds across three interconnected dimensions: literary criticism, linguistics and translation studies, and cultural studies, collectively forming a multi-faceted yet unevenly developed academic landscape. This review aims to systematically synthesize the critical reception of these four novels, clarify dominant academic perspectives, and identify significant scholarly lacunae (blind spots). By doing so, it establishes the exigency and theoretical foundation for the present study.

1. Perspectives on Literary Criticism: From Discrete Textual Analysis to Holistic Poetic Inquiry

Literary criticism serves as the foundational pillar of al-Harthi scholarship, demonstrating a discernible methodological shift from localized close readings of individual texts toward a comprehensive synthesis of overarching poetic and stylistic paradigms. Within this evolving field, scholars have primarily gravitated toward the following thematic and structural dimensions:

1) Feminism, Identity Politics, and Psychological Depth

The interrogation of female consciousness constitutes a pivotal thematic arc that traverses Jokha al-Harthī's entire literary corpus. Scholars widely acknowledge that in *Celestial Bodies*, al-Harthī utilizes the divergent fates of three generations of women to expose the multifaceted struggles and eventual empowerment of subjects caught at the nexus of patriarchal structures, rapid modernization, and the enduring legacy of slavery (Bouhadjar, 2023). Existing critical perspectives on the novel are notably diverse: they range from existentialist inquiries into individual predicaments (Manshi & Mishra, 2020) to intersectional frameworks that analyze the symbiotic interplay of gender, class, and racial oppression. Furthermore, psychoanalytic readings have offered profound insights into the characters' internal psychological landscapes (Darat al-Nasiha, 2021).

This critical focus on feminine experience extends to al-Harthī's other major works. In *Manamat*, scholars employ psychoanalytic and sociological lenses to examine how the interplay between dreams and reality underscores the deterministic forces shaping women's lives within traditional Omani society, while simultaneously addressing pressing social exigencies such as domestic violence (Ahmed, 2025). Similarly, studies of *The Bitter Orange Tree* highlight the text's subversion of monolithic stereotypes regarding Arab women. By focusing on characters like the grandmother, Bint Amir, and her granddaughter, Zuhair, al-Harthī showcases a distinctive resilience and autonomy amidst a landscape of profound cultural transition (Domini, 2022). Finally, the evolution of maternal roles and the intricacies of intergenerational dynamics remain a cornerstone of scholarly discourse across both *Celestial Bodies* and *The Bitter Orange Tree* (Yusoff & Raihanah, 2022).

2) Narratology, Formal Innovation, and Theoretical Application

Alharthi's distinctive narrative style represents another focal point of scholarly inquiry. Research generally highlights her departure from linear storytelling in favor of fragmented, multi-perspective, and polyphonic structures. By utilizing temporal-spatial leaps and a collage of narrative voices, she constructs a comprehensive social landscape—a technique vividly evidenced in *Celestial Bodies* (Al-Daoudi, 2019; Al-Badi, 2018) and *The Bitter Orange Tree* (Abdul-Lawi, 2025; Jaji, 2022). Investigations into *Manamat* (Dreams) focus on its synthesis of realism, Sufi mysticism, and dream logic, noting how first-person narration explores the surreal dimensions of the text (Omar, 2006; Al-Luwati, 2007; Al-Ajili, 2025). Furthermore, *Silk and the Gazelle* has been recognized for its "oral weaving" style, which incorporates elements of popular culture to create a stark contrast with classical narrative traditions (Hamza, 2022; Abu al-Nasr, 2021; Al-Maamari & Al-Shidi, 2022). Such stylistic choices are frequently framed within the discourses of postmodernism and magical realism (Kaur, n.d.; Rafseena & Kumar, 2023).

Significantly, while Bakhtinian theory has been tentatively applied to Alharthi's oeuvre—particularly *Celestial Bodies*—existing scholarship has primarily utilized the concepts of "polyphony" and "the carnivalesque" to interpret narrative plurality and the subversion of power hierarchies (Kriri, 2019; Farid, 2023). However, these applications often remain at the level of general categorization or serve as fragmented analytical perspectives. To date, there has been no systematic, in-depth application of the core Bakhtinian tenet—"heteroglossia"—as an overarching framework. Specifically, research has yet to examine how diverse "social languages" (such as religious scriptures, classical poetry, folk proverbs, folkloric narratives, and English loanwords) intertwine, clash, and engage in dialogic tension within Alharthi's

novels. This study, therefore, seeks to fill this critical lacuna by using heteroglossia to map the ideological stratification and cultural transformation of Omani society, constituting the primary theoretical contribution of this research.

2. Perspectives from Linguistics, Stylistics, and Translation Studies

This dimension of scholarship scrutinizes the linguistic fabric of Alharthi's oeuvre and its subsequent transformations within cross-cultural circulation.

1) Linguistic and Stylistic Analysis

Research in this area interrogates the formal linguistic properties of her narratives. Analyses of *The Bitter Orange Tree*, for instance, emphasize its intricate linguistic structure and evocative imagery as a reflection of pre-Renaissance Omani societal dynamics (Al-Saadi, 2017). Stylistic inquiries into *Celestial Bodies* have meticulously examined rhetorical devices indigenous to Arabic—such as metaphor (*isti'ara*) and metonymy (*kinaya*)—to decode their narrative functions (Salakhova & Nabiullina, 2022). Concurrently, scholars have highlighted the code-switching between Arabic and English in her novels, viewing this linguistic intersection as a signifier of Oman's colonial history and its contemporary engagement with globalization. This linguistic hybridity is often analyzed in relation to the fluid identities of her characters (Joseph, 2022; Veetil, 2019).

2) Translation Studies

Scholarship in this field has centered predominantly on the English translation of *Celestial Bodies*. These studies explore translation as a mode of "rewriting" (Lefevere's framework), investigating how ideological shifts and translation strategies manage cultural specificities and gendered discourses (Al-Ma'ani & Al-Jamaei, 2021). Researchers analyze how these choices shape the reception and socio-cultural imagination of target-language audiences (Alhadidiya, 2021). Notably, the translation and critical introduction of Alharthi's other works remain in their nascent stages, presenting a significant opportunity for further scholarly expansion.

3. Cultural Studies Perspectives: Heritage, Transition

Cultural studies scholarship situates Alharthi's narratives within the broader context of Oman's socio-historical transformations.

1) Cultural Heritage and Folklore

Research has extensively analyzed the incorporation of cultural heritage in her novels, including Omani proverbs, oral poetry, customary rituals, and local legends (Hanina, 2021; Ghawadra, 2020). These elements are conceptualized as "living forces" embedded in communal memory, serving to uphold traditional moral values and negotiate national identity (Siddig, 2025). This folkloric presence is particularly pronounced in both *Celestial Bodies* and *The Bitter Orange Tree*, where traditional knowledge functions as a narrative anchor.

2) Social Transformation and Historical Narrative

Alharthi's works are widely regarded as a "literary chronicle" documenting Oman's dramatic transition from a traditional Imamate society to a modern nation-state. Scholarship explores how her fiction depicts intergenerational conflict, the shifting paradigm of values, and the restructuring of social hierarchies under the pressures of modernization and globalization (Balakrishna, 2020; Manshi & Mishra, 2020). Both *The Bitter Orange Tree* and *Celestial*

Bodies have been lauded for their courageous exploration of the historical legacy of slavery and its residual impact on contemporary Omani society (Domini, 2022). Scholars argue that her narratives synthesize the "self" and the "other" within a globalized framework, thereby illustrating the developmental trajectory of Omani fiction (Al-Ma'mari, 2018).

II. Theoretical Foundations of Heteroglossia and Its Literary Application

While Mikhail Bakhtin's theory of heteroglossia has become an established paradigm in literary criticism, its application to Alharthi's novels remains in its infancy.

In the specific context of Alharthi studies, Kotaba Saleh Fenjan, in analyzing the "polyphony of time" in *Celestial Bodies*, briefly observes that the novel's deployment of social dialects embodies Bakhtinian heteroglossia, thereby reflecting Oman's intricate social hierarchies. Similarly, Hem Raj Bansal, in discussing female marginality, notes the juxtaposition of Qur'anic language with modern educational discourse, suggesting that these linguistic ruptures are rooted in deep-seated cognitive disparities. Fenjan further argues that the nonlinear alignment of traditional and modern temporalities creates a "temporal heterogeneity" that mirrors Oman's postcolonial condition.

Crucially, the study of heteroglossia within these texts must be situated within the broader framework of Oman's rich folk literature and oral traditions. Omer Siddig's (2025) research demonstrates that Omani folk heritage—encompassing Nabati poetry, proverbs, and legends—acts as a "living mirror" of social values, playing a pivotal role in reinforcing morality, forging national identity, and maintaining social cohesion. These folkloric discursive systems constitute a profound sociolinguistic resource in their own right.

When Alharthi embeds genres such as proverbs, aphorisms, and poetry into her narratives, she is not merely employing a literary device; she is mobilizing a sophisticated network of cultural symbols and discursive systems rooted in local heritage. This practice aligns precisely with Bakhtin's concept of the "embeddedness of social language." Through such embedding, her novels are transformed into dialogic spaces where traditional oral heritage engages in negotiation, dialogue, and even resistance against cultural assimilation within the framework of modern fictional art.

In the broader field of literary studies, the theory of heteroglossia has been fruitfully applied to diverse textual analyses. For instance, Madran (2009) utilized this framework to interpret *Wuthering Heights*, revealing how an interplay of social discourses forms a dialogic network that supplants monological narration. Rukhsar (2025), through a Bakhtinian reading of *The Hungry Stones*, explores how the interaction of multiple voices constructs a dialogic space where modernity, memory, and identity converge. Similarly, Masoomi and Rashidi (2020) demonstrate that in *Mrs. Dalloway* and *Things We Left Unsaid*, heteroglossic environments serve as pivotal sites for the negotiation of self-perception and identity. These studies underscore the efficacy of Bakhtinian theory in analyzing women's writing and marginal discourses, particularly where texts catalyze ideological clashes by embedding diverse stylistic elements such as poetry and religious discourse. Furthermore, research has expanded into multimodal media; Boomhower (2016), for example, illustrates how the graphic novel *Le Chat du Rabbin* achieves heteroglossic expression through the interweaving of visual and textual multilingual symbols.

These scholarly contributions corroborate Vyacheslav Ivanov's (1999) assertion: in the Bakhtinian sense, heteroglossia encompasses not only the stylistic and class-based variances

within a sociolinguistic context but also the writer's deliberate artistic intent in representing these tensions within the novel.

Summary of Research Gaps and the Current Study

In summary, while scholarship on Alharthi's oeuvre has achieved significant milestones—particularly in feminist interpretations and narrative analyses of *Celestial Bodies*—the scope of international research remains relatively narrow. Although interest in her other works is burgeoning, the existing literature is largely fragmented. Due to linguistic barriers and varying levels of global recognition, the critical depth afforded to her broader bibliography falls short of that received by *Celestial Bodies*. Current studies often prioritize internal formalist analysis, character sketches, or isolated thematic interpretations, lacking a systematic and comparative approach that treats her body of work as a cohesive whole. Most notably, there is a conspicuous absence of a unified theoretical perspective capable of bridging her multiple narratives.

Furthermore, while some scholars have noted the heterogeneous nature of her texts, they have yet to fully integrate Omani local discursive resources (such as folk traditions) or employ a comprehensive heteroglossic framework. There remains a need for specialized research that interrogates her linguistic strategies, stylistic hybridity, and representations of social ideology across multiple texts.

In light of these lacunae, this study adopts Bakhtin's theories of polyphony and heteroglossia as a unified analytical framework. By incorporating four of Alharthi's novels into a comprehensive examination, this research aims to systematically explore how her texts construct complex heteroglossic systems through the assimilation and transformation of "social languages"—including folkloric discourse and social dialects. Ultimately, this study seeks to reveal the stratification of Omani society, the tensions inherent in cultural transformation, and the individual's pursuit of identity within a pluralistic discursive landscape.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

Drawing upon the preceding literature review and theoretical synthesis, this study employs Mikhail Bakhtin's theory of heteroglossia as its primary analytical framework. The objective is to examine the manifestation of linguistic plurality within Jokha Alharthi's novels and to interrogate its broader socio-cultural implications. To this end, the research addresses the following two interrelated core questions:

1) Mechanisms of Formal Representation

Through which specific textual strategies and discursive modalities is heteroglossia instantiated across Alharthi's four novels? Specifically, how is this plurality orchestrated through the distinctive linguistic registers of characters across disparate social classes, genders, and generations? Furthermore, how is heteroglossia formally realized through the integration of diverse "social languages"—ranging from Arabic proverbs and classical/modern poetry to historical allusions, folkloric narratives, dialectal variations, and official administrative discourses?

2) Socio-cultural and Ideological Significance

In what ways does the heteroglossic system constructed within these novels function as a literary vehicle to represent and interpret the socio-cultural diversity, historical intricacies, and transformative tensions of contemporary Omani society? More fundamentally, how does

this heteroglossic mode of writing embody the "democratic spirit" inherent in the novelistic genre—that is, by providing a symbolic arena for equal dialogue, ideological contestation, and negotiation among competing cultural voices, historical memories, and value systems?

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

To rigorously investigate the research questions outlined above, this study adopts a qualitative research paradigm, centered on descriptive-analytical textual criticism. By synthesizing Mikhail Bakhtin's theories of dialogism and heteroglossia, the study conducts a systematic narrative discourse analysis of Alharthi's four novels: *Manamat*, *Celestial Bodies*, *The Bitter Orange Tree*, and *Silk and Gazelles*. The research design is structured into the following five methodological phases:

1) Close Reading and Contextual Mapping

An intensive close reading of the primary texts will be conducted to achieve a comprehensive grasp of their narrative architectures, thematic preoccupations, and intellectual trajectories. This phase establishes the essential foundation for subsequent micro-level discourse analysis.

2) Theoretical Framework Construction

Guided by Bakhtin's core tenets—namely heteroglossia (*raznorechie*), polyphony, and dialogism—this stage establishes the analytical parameters for the study. Specific emphasis is placed on the social stratification of ideological language, the intertextual dialogism between literary genres, and the authorial orchestration of multifaceted narrative voices.

3) Identification and Extraction of Heteroglossic Fragments

Within the established theoretical framework, the study will identify and extract critical discourse fragments that exemplify linguistic heterogeneity. These samples are categorized as follows:

- Folkloric and Oral Traditions: Proverbs, aphorisms, and idiomatic expressions integrated into the narrative fabric;
- Intertextual Poetics: Quotations and resonances from classical and modern Arabic poetry;
- Allusory Discourse: Expressions invoking historical, religious, or literary allusions;
- Sociolinguistic Variation: The juxtaposition of regional dialects, colloquialisms, and standardized official language that signify class, community, or institutional affiliations.

4) Typological Categorization and Contextual Analysis

The extracted discursive materials will be classified into typologies based on their sociolinguistic origins (e.g., folk discourse, elite discourse, religious discourse, and the discourse of modernity).

These elements will then be re-situated within their specific narrative contexts to analyze their functional relationship with character arc development, plot progression, and thematic resonance.

5) Sociocultural Synthesis and Ideological Interpretation

By correlating the speaker's (character or narrator) sociographic data—including identity, class, lineage, education, and gender—this study will analyze how these variables shape the ideological contour of their discourse. Ultimately, the research explores how the dialogue, friction, or fusion among these competing discourses constructs a literary heterocosm that mirrors the historical dynamics and complex social realities of contemporary Oman.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The theoretical foundation of this study is primarily anchored in Mikhail Bakhtin's dialogic philosophy, specifically his seminal concept of heteroglossia (*raznorechie*). Bakhtin systematically articulated this concept in his 1934 essay, "Discourse in the Novel," defining it as the multiplicity of "social languages" that coexist within any national language—stratified by social class, profession, generation, ideology, and stylistic register (Bakhtin, 1981). Bakhtin posits that language is a dynamic arena defined by a perpetual tug-of-war between centripetal and centrifugal forces: while centripetal forces strive for linguistic unification and homogenization, centrifugal forces relentlessly drive differentiation, hybridization, and renewal (Bakhtin, 1981; Kaul, 2024). For Bakhtin, the novelistic genre possesses an inherent centrifugal tendency; it acts as a paradigm for artistically organizing heteroglossia into a "structured stylistic system" (Bakhtin, 1981, p. 300).

Heteroglossia is far more than a mere linguistic amalgam; its essence is fundamentally dialogic. Every "social language" that permeates a text carries its own distinct worldview, value system, and ideological posture. These voices collide, intersect, and resonate, forming a complex dialogic network (Bakhtin, 1981; Rukhsar, 2025). Consequently, the critical task of analyzing heteroglossia lies in revealing how these anonymous social voices interact and how the author, through their orchestration, "expresses a differentiated socio-ideological stance within the context of the polyphonic discourse of their era" (Bakhtin, 1981, p. 300). This necessitates not only an examination of the linguistic markers of these voices but also an inquiry into the underlying socio-historical and ideological motivations (Ji & Xin, 2012).

Applying this framework to Alharthi's novels is particularly pertinent for several reasons. First, Omani society—characterized by its profound historical legacy, cultural pluralism, and rapid modernization (Ahmed, 2023)—provides fertile sociolinguistic ground for the manifestation of heteroglossia.

Second, Alharthi's fiction is widely recognized for its incisive exploration of Omani social structures, gender dynamics, historical memory, and cultural shifts (Abdul Ghaffar, 2025). Her texts are densely layered with diverse discursive genres, ranging from folk aphorisms to classical poetry, offering an ideal site to observe the mechanisms of heteroglossia in action. Finally, Bakhtinian theory is uniquely equipped to analyze marginalized voices and decode the inscription of power relations within language (Masoomi & Rashidi, 2020), facilitating a deeper interpretation of the complex subjectivities of women and subaltern communities in Alharthi's work.

In conclusion, this study adopts Bakhtinian heteroglossia and dialogism as its overarching framework to systematically decode the multilayered, polyphonic landscape of Alharthi's novels. It seeks to elucidate how this literary practice serves as a critical medium for reflecting, interrogating, and ultimately intervening in the socio-cultural realities of contemporary Oman.

ANALYTICAL PROCESS

To systematically investigate the specific manifestations of heteroglossia within Alharthi's novels and their broader socio-cultural implications, this section provides a rigorous descriptive and interpretive analysis of her four primary works. Building upon the theoretical framework and methodological parameters established in the preceding chapters, the analysis focuses on identifying and decoding the diverse linguistic genres embedded within the narrative fabric.

The study treats these embedded genres as distinct "social languages" or "ideological stances" (Bakhtin, 1981), examining their interaction within a polyphonic and dialogic literary framework. The analytical trajectory begins with a typological categorization of the discursive elements found in the texts. On this basis, the research delves into the intricate correlations between these discursive categories and the characters' social trajectories, the overarching dialogic architecture of the narratives, and the shifting historical landscape of contemporary Oman.

1) Aphorisms and Proverbs in Fiction: Folk Wisdom as Social Discipline and Class Discourse

From the perspective of Bakhtinian heteroglossia, maxims and proverbs are far more than rhetorical embellishments; they represent a highly concentrated form of "social language." Originating from collective life practices and historical experiences, these linguistic forms embody the ethical judgments and worldviews of specific communities, evolving into a stable, authoritative discourse through intergenerational transmission (Bakhtin, 1981). As scholars have noted, proverbs represent a "consensus reached between elites and the common people regarding their phrasing and meaning," drawing their persuasive power from this broad, cross-class recognition. They are simultaneously the "product and the fruit of experience" (Al-Farabi, 2003, p. 74), characterized by a "concise yet profound" form (Amin, 1953, p. 61) that distills complex socio-historical realities into accessible arguments (Al-Sahrawi, 2008, p. 62). In Alharthi's novels, these vessels of folk wisdom are strategically woven into the narrative fabric to signify characters' social identities, reveal power dynamics, and facilitate ideological dialogue.

First, proverbs function as internalized mechanisms of social discipline, regulating individual emotions and behaviors. In *Manamat*, following a period of profound emotional trauma, the female protagonist recalls the proverb: "وَقَدِيمًا قِيلَ: عَيْنٌ لَا تَرَى، قَلْبٌ لَا يَخْرُنْ" (*It has been said since ancient times: what the eye does not see, the heart does not rue*) (p. 79). The context of this invocation is significant: it immediately follows a metaphor depicting fate as an invisibly woven web ("Threads are woven, we are wrapped, yet we cannot see the spider"). Here, the proverb is not a conscious creation of the character but rather the "discourse of the other"—a pre-established voice from the collective consciousness that intrudes upon her inner monologue. It advocates a philosophy of endurance and stoicism, aimed at neutralizing individual pain and steering the character from "active grief" toward "passive acceptance." This illustrates how social discipline is internalized through language; an authoritative voice rooted in traditional collective experience intervenes to shape the individual's—particularly the woman's—response to suffering, revealing the mechanisms by which traditional culture regulates emotional expression.

Second, proverbs serve as linguistic markers and survival strategies for specific social strata, highlighting the asymmetrical distribution of discursive power. This is most evident in the character of Zarifa, the freed slave in *Celestial Bodies*. Her speech is replete with proverbs

such as “مَفْعِيَةٌ أَبُوهَا فِي حَصَاةٍ” p121 (*Like father, like daughter*) and “أَفْتِي مَعْرِفَتِي، رَاحَتِي مَا أَعْرَفَ شَيْءٌ” (*My knowledge is my calamity; my peace lies in knowing nothing*) (pp. 71,). As Dr. Tabish Hanina (2021) astutely observes, for marginalized groups like Zarifa—who occupy the social periphery and lack formal education—proverbs are more than mere linguistic habits. Invoking these collectively sanctioned maxims serves as a discursive strategy to claim legitimacy within a field dominated by the elite (who often quote classical poetry). Proverbs provide her with a “safe haven and an impregnable fortress,” helping to bridge the psychological chasm created by rigid class divides (Hanina, 2021). Zarifa’s reliance on folk wisdom stands in stark contrast to the erudite language of the landowning family, vividly inscribing Omani social stratification into the text’s heteroglossic structure.

Furthermore, proverbs generate complex ironic and critical effects within dialogue, significantly contributing to the text’s polyphonic architecture. A notable exchange in the novel cleverly parodies the traditional “from the cradle to the grave” aphorism: a male character declares, “ابْنْتُ عَمِّي مَخْطُوبَةٌ لِي مُنْذُ الْمَهْدِ” (*My cousin has been betrothed to me since the cradle*), to which the female protagonist skeptically retorts, “إِلَى الْخَدِّ؟” (*To that extent?*). The man then extends “al-mahd” (*the cradle*) to “al-lahd” (*the grave*) to underscore the inescapable, lifelong nature of the commitment (p. 61). This hyperbolic extension deconstructs a solemn vow of betrothal into biting satire. The subsequent narrative—noting that “only the corner of his mouth curled into a smile... when he feigned a smile, hoping others would see through his pretense”—reinforces the dissonance between verbal performance and genuine affect through nonverbal cues. This dual irony, orchestrated through the structural subversion of proverbs and somatic cues, serves as a critique of the rigidity of arranged marriages and their erasure of individual agency. By undermining the monologic authority of traditional patriarchal discourse, this scene exemplifies the text’s inherent polyphony.

Finally, proverbs fulfill a unique function at the intersection of disparate cultures and social strata. In *Silk and Gazelles*, dialogues among migrant workers, and their interactions with local Omanis, are occasionally infused with “culturally translated” wisdom. In these instances, the dynamic of understanding and misinterpretation surrounding proverbs serves as a micro-metaphor for cultural fissures and social estrangement. In summary, through her adept mobilization of aphorisms and proverbs, Alharthi does more than merely enrich the narrative’s cultural texture; she transforms it into a site of vivid sociolinguistic practice. As essential components of her heteroglossic discourse, proverbs function as internal mechanisms of social discipline, strategic tools for marginalized voices to claim visibility, or subversive instruments to challenge traditional authority. Together, they construct a multi-layered landscape of Omani social discourse, defined by profound ideological and power-laden tensions.

2) The Heterogenization of Religious Discourse: Secular Appropriation, Ideological Negotiation, and Emotional Integration

From the perspective of Bakhtinian heteroglossia, the presence of religious discourse—specifically sacred texts of absolute authority such as the Qur’an and Hadith—constitutes a primary arena for the intense interplay between centripetal and centrifugal forces. As the cornerstone of Islamic faith, the Qur’an is regarded as the ultimate source of ontological truth; its discourse inherently exerts a powerful centripetal force toward linguistic and ideological unification. However, when these sacred utterances are transposed into the polyphonic world of the novel, they inevitably detach from their purely dogmatic origins and become “fictionalized” (Bakhtin, 1981). In Alharthi’s narrative, religious discourse does not function as a detached monologue; instead, it is deeply embedded in everyday practices, social frictions,

and individual subjectivities. By participating in a complex dialogic network, these texts undergo a centrifugal trajectory—shifting from monolithic sacred authority to multifaceted secular instruments.

First, religious discourse converges with local folkloric practices, manifesting a syncretism of orthodox faith and indigenous knowledge systems. In *Manamat*, when the female protagonist suffers from acute physical and psychological distress—characterized by trembling and convulsions—her aunt’s intervention is prescriptive: “سَأْخُذُهَا مَعِيَ إِلَى الْبَلَدِ وَأَدَاوِيهَا... لَنْ أَخْذَهَا” “لِلْمَشَايخِ بَلَّ سَاعًا لِحَبْلِهَا بِالْقُرْآنِ” (*I will take her to the countryside to heal her... I will not take her to the sorcerers, but will cure her with the Qur’an*) (p. 39). During the ritual, she recites verses such as “And to Him belongs whatever dwells in the heavens and the earth.” This scene serves as a classic exemplar of heteroglossia: the Quranic discourse—representing absolute monotheism and transcendent divinity (centripetal force)—is assimilated into a concrete, experiential folk healing ritual (centrifugal force). The narrator’s deliberate attempt to demarcate “the Qur’an” from “sorcery” subtly reveals that, in communal practice, orthodox healing and heterodox witchcraft often share a shared psychological and cultural substrate. The boundaries between the two are fluid, subject to constant negotiation and redefinition.

A similar hybridity appears in *The Bitter Orange Tree*, where the grandmother utilizes a talisman (*talsam*) inscribed with Quranic verses: “In the name of Allah, the Most Gracious, the Most Merciful; Allah is sufficient for us, and He is the Best of Guardians” (p. 5). Here, the sacred text is materialized into a tangible, wearable object, shifting its function from spiritual guidance to a corporeal defense against illness. This practice incorporates Quranic verses into a folk medical system, constructing a discourse of “vernacular Islam” that—while perhaps not sanctioned by official dogma—is ubiquitous among the populace. This transformation renders religious discourse a crucial stratum within the novel’s heteroglossic landscape, where the sacred is repurposed to address the immediate exigencies of human life.

Secondly, religious discourse functions as a potent instrument in ideological struggles, competitively appropriated by disparate social groups and generations, thereby revealing its inherent capacity for dialogic transformation. *Celestial Bodies* offers a particularly compelling example. When the family elders, adhering to traditional custom, deem a postpartum woman “impure,” the modern-educated Asma takes the initiative: “نُقَلِّبُ الصَّفَحَاتِ ثُمَّ تَضْحَكُ فَجَاءَهُ وَهِيَ تَقْرَأُ” “بِصَوْتِ عَالٍ” (*turning the pages and then suddenly laughing as she reads aloud*) a passage from the Hadith: “عَنْ أَبِي هُرَيْرَةَ... قَالَ: إِنَّ حَيْضَتَكَ لَيْسَتْ فِي يَدِكَ” (*Narrated by Abu Hurayrah... [the Prophet] said: “Your menstruation is not in your hands”*) (p. 137). She triumphantly exclaims: “كُنْتُ... مُتَأَكِّدَةً.. مُتَأَكِّدَةً” (*I was certain... certain!*).

In this scene, a canonical text derived from sacred authority is mobilized by a young woman to challenge, through evidence-based citation, a secularized gender norm rooted in patriarchal custom. Asma’s action transcends simple quotation; it is a contest over discursive power. She appropriates the voice of the highest religious authority to provide deconstructive leverage against the bodily taboos normalized by traditional life. This vividly illustrates Bakhtin’s theory: every language entering the novel’s dialogic field—including sacred language—is compelled to “respond” to other voices and is imbued with new, often subversive, intentions (Bakhtin, 1984). Here, religious discourse is no longer a rigid dogma but a tension-filled dialogic space where meaning is redefined through the friction between conservatism and innovation, discipline and resistance.

Furthermore, religious discourse permeates the individual's private consciousness, forming a complex internal dialogue with personal desires, fears, and agency. In *Celestial Bodies*, Maya delivers a passionate, prayer-like monologue before her wedding: “ يَا رَبِّي أَعَاهِدُكَ، ... أَكْتُبُ شَيْئًا... فَقَطُّ أُرِيدُ أَنْ أَرَاهُ ” (*O my Lord, I swear to You, I swear to You that I will not write anything... I only want to see him...*) (p. 8). This confession, structured around the sacralized form of a pledge to God, infuses the prayer with the protagonist's fervent secular longing. A fierce friction arises between the formal framework of the prayer (centripetal force) and the surging private desire (centrifugal force).

Maya's subsequent post-marital choices—such as "ceasing regular prayer," "opting to give birth at the Christian Maria Hospital," and "naming her daughter London" (Bansal, 2022)—constitute a behavioral and ideological dialogue with her past self. Her early, emotionally charged language of prayer contrasts with her later shift away from traditional religious practice, forming a temporal self-dialogue.

This flux in faith is not a simple negation but the result of a complex interplay of internal voices—attachment to tradition, dissatisfaction with the status quo, and a yearning for alternative possibilities. Religious discourse serves here as a critical medium for documenting this internal spiritual struggle amidst cultural transition.

Finally, religious discourse plays a pivotal role in emotional integration and the attribution of meaning within collective rituals, effectively subsuming individual suffering into a shared communal framework. In the novel *Silk and the Gazelles*, when confronted with death, a character recites the Qur'anic verse: “ قُولُوا إِنَّا لِلَّهِ وَإِنَّا إِلَيْهِ رَاجِعُونَ ” (*Say: "Truly we belong to Allah, and truly to Him we shall return"*) (p. 19). The invocation of this verse (2:156) in a funerary context represents a quintessential moment where what Bakhtin terms "authoritative discourse" intervenes to stabilize the world of polyphony.

When individuals encounter the existential collapse, the void of meaning, and the linguistic disorder precipitated by death—manifesting as unspeakable grief or existential questioning—this pre-existing sacred narrative acts as a powerful centripetal force. Its function is to relocate the individual's chaotic cries of suffering within a universally recognized order of meaning concerning destiny and belonging.

Simultaneously, a "heteroglossic resonance" emerges between private sorrow and divine consolation. While the scripture functions as an ontological truth in a religious context, within the novel's everyday settings, it primarily fulfills the socio-psychological functions of "solace" and "ritual closure"—a manifestation of the centrifugal shift in the meaning of sacred discourse during its concrete, secular application.

In summary, viewed through the Bakhtinian lens, religious discourse in Alharthi's novels is not a monolithic or closed sacred monologue. Instead, it functions as a site of heteroglossia, intersecting with folk practices, indigenous knowledge, and social conflict. It engages in a constant dialogue with the individual's private subjectivities and integrates disordered suffering into collective rituals.

Through these complex textual practices, the sacred centripetal force continually encounters and merges with the centrifugal force of secular existence, jointly weaving a polyphonic panorama of Omani religious life. Within this landscape, a perpetual and unfinished dialogue unfolds between unified doctrine and diverse practice, authoritative interpretation and personal understanding, and traditional constraints and modern transformation.

3) The Dialogic Field of Poetry: Social Stratification and Ideological Negotiation from Folk Ballads to Classical Quotations

Within Bakhtinian heteroglossia, poetry—encompassing orally transmitted folk ballads, introspective monologues, and quoted classical or modern texts—constitutes a highly condensed and semantically rich layer within the novel's heteroglossic system. As a stylized "social language," poetry not only carries the emotional structures and aesthetic codes of specific communities but also serves as a crucial signifier of cultural capital, facilitating intergenerational dialogue and exploring complex interiorities. In Alharthi's novels, diverse poetic forms are juxtaposed and interwoven, constructing a polyphonic network defined by multiple voices, distinct temporal-spatial orientations, and competing ideological stances.

First, folk oral poetry, as a vehicle for collective rituals and communal memory, generates a dialogic tension with the individual's experience of modernity. In the wedding scene of *Silk and the Gazelles*, a traditional song is recited: "How sweet is her gait, and how sweet is the style of her hair... وَحَلَفْتُ لِأَصْنُوعَ لَهَا مَخْلَقَ وَدِينَارَيْنِ. وَاحِدٌ مُشَمَّسٌ وَوَاحِدٌ صَبِيغَةُ الْبَحْرَيْنِ" (*How lovely is her gait, how lovely the vermilion of her nails... I swear to craft for her a pair of earrings and two gold coins—one gilded, the other a coin from Bahrain*) (p. 11). This improvised ballad is more than mere atmospheric background; it represents a "collective ritual discourse." By aestheticizing the bride's beauty and enumerating the dowry, it publicly enacts and reinforces the material expectations and familial blessings inherent in the traditional marriage system.

The ballad constructs a pre-modern, localized space woven from concrete materials (henna, gold) and regional symbols (Bahrain). This centripetal force, representing the collective will of tradition, forms a multidimensional counterpoint to the protagonist Ghazala's private longing for a modern love that transcends material and social conventions. A similar dialogic relationship appears in a lullaby: "O my beloved, for whom I would adorn myself with the folds of my belly and the folds of my skirt..." (*Oh, my beloved, for his beauty I would slit open my belly to make a bed for him...*) (p. 55). This ancient song, saturated with imagery of sacrifice and maternal devotion, is sung by the nanny Sa'da. Its resonance lingers in the consciousness of Ghazala—now a modern professional—even as she manages "invoices" and interacts with her "manager." This auditory "intrusion" of memory represents the unresolved struggle between the traditional discourse of self-sacrificing motherhood and the modern discourse of individual rationality and professionalism. It vividly illustrates the collision of heterogeneous voices within the crucible of individual consciousness.

Second, the invocation of classical poetry—specifically Sufi mysticism and Andalusian verse—functions as a sophisticated mechanism for articulating intellectual identity and facilitating cultural reflection through historical intertextuality. In the novel *Dream*, a paratextual note transcribes a quatrain by Al-Hallaj, the preeminent Sufi martyr-poet of the Abbasid era: "The hearts of lovers have eyes. They see what the onlookers do not see. And hearts fly without wings to the kingdom of the Lord of the Worlds" (p. 103). This verse transcends mundane affection, gesturing toward a Sufi ontology where the seeker attains the divine essence through spiritual eros (*al-'ishq*). Its integration into the text imbues the narrative with a transcendental layer that seeks metaphysical resolution, providing a stark ontological contrast to the fragmented, worldly voices that populate the rest of the novel. This citation is not merely a decorative allusion but an embodiment of the narrator's (or author's) cultural capital and spiritual yearnings.

A more poignant manifestation of historical intertextuality occurs in *The Bitter Orange Tree*. When the protagonist, Zuhair (زهور), recounts her grandmother's hardships, she invokes the elegiac verses of the Andalusian monarch-poet Al-Mu'tamid ibn Abbad (المعتمد بن عباد), composed during his imprisonment: "يَخْطُرْنَ فِي الطِّينِ وَالْأَفْدَامِ حَافِيَةً كَأَنَّهُنَّ لَمْ تَطَّأْ مِسْكَ وَكَافُورًا" (They tread through the mire barefoot, as though they had never known the scent of musk and camphor) (Chapter 8, p. 2). Zuhair maps her grandmother's life of rural toil onto the tragic figure of the fallen queen in the poem, creating a powerful socio-historical irony. This juxtaposition bridges the chasm between a humble peasant woman and a dynastic legend, utilizing the sensory imagery of courtly opulence (musk and camphor) to underscore the stark reality of destitution (bare feet and mud). Far from a static literary device, this dialogue across epochs challenges the erasure of ordinary women's lives in "Grand Narratives" of history. It establishes a temporal and spatial resonance between the modern, educated consciousness of Zuhair and the classical elegies, ultimately giving voice to the ancestral silence of her grandmother.

Furthermore, the invocation of classical *Udri* erotica has emerged as a discursive hallmark for the nascent generation of educated women to articulate affect, perform identity, and delineate themselves from the linguistic frameworks of their predecessors. In *The Bitter Orange Tree*, during an exchange with peers, Zuhair invokes the verses of Qais ibn Dharih to satirically probe her friends' emotional states: "وَالْحَبِّ آيَاتٌ تُبَيِّنُ لِقَفِّي نُحُولًا وَتَعْرِى مِنْ يَدَيْهِ الْأَشَاجِعُ" (Love bears signs that betray the youth: a physical wasting and the stark protrusion of tendons) (Chapter 4, p. 4).

Such citations function as sociocultural coordinates, situating the speakers within a specific historical trajectory: they represent a post-Qaboos era intelligentsia, beneficiaries of systemic educational reforms who are deeply immersed in the classical Arabic canon (Al-Saqri, 2019). Their discursive repertoire—which deftly appropriates classical metaphors to navigate modern sensibilities—establishes a profound epistemic rupture with the previous generation of illiterate women, whose oral culture was rooted in proverbs and manual labor. Here, poetry operates as "cultural capital" in the Bourdieusian sense, serving as an entry point into an elite community of emotional praxis where written civilization and literary heritage constitute a shared vernacular.

Finally, the integration of modern verse and lyricized interior monologues constructs a heterogeneous space for exploring psychological fragmentation and secrecy. In *Dream*, the protagonist's inner life crystallizes into a free-verse monologue echoing modernist aesthetics: "O love that set my eyelids ablaze... my soul remains a thread of silk, a bird from a distant land that neither folds its wings nor takes flight" (p. 29). This lyrical eruption shatters traditional prosodic constraints, deploying modernist tropes of "displacement" and "fragility" to externalize the character's alienated psyche.

Similarly, in *Silk and the Gazelle*, the text incorporates Nizar Qabbani's stylistic influence through a digital medium: "أَنَا الَّذِي صَعِدْتُ لِأَكْبِيرَ لَوْحٍ مَصِيرِي... وَسَكَرْتُ مِنَ الْوَجْدِ" (I ascended to shatter the tablet of my destiny... intoxicated by a longing for one who is not mine) (p. 122). The imagery of the "tablet of destiny" (*lawh masiri*) deliberately appropriates the Islamic theological construct of the "Preserved Tablet" (*al-Lawh al-Mahfuz*)—the ultimate symbol of divine determinism. By "decentering" this sacred signifier to articulate raw personal affect, the text generates a high-tension heteroglossia: a violent collision between absolute fatality and individual agency, where sacred meta-narratives are repurposed to voice secular passion.

In summary, the poetic intercalations within al-Harthī's oeuvre—ranging from the folk and classical to the modern—occupy an indispensable locus within the Bakhtinian theater of heteroglossia. As highly encoded “social languages,” these poetic forms function to crystallize collective agency, demarcate cultural stratifications, preserve historical memory, and probe the intricacies of the psyche. These poetic discourses are embroiled in a perennial process of dialogue, negotiation, confrontation, and resonance—not only with one another but also with the prosaic, vernacular, and theological registers that constitute the novel's fabric. It is precisely through this meticulous semiotic weaving that the narrative deepens its polyphonic architecture, penetrating the very marrow of cultural and aesthetic experience. Ultimately, this strategy vividly maps the multifaceted spiritual topography and ideological spectrum of Omani society as it navigates the tensions of cultural inheritance, generational rupture, and the transformative impact of modernity.

4) Narrative Intercalations, Allusions, and Folklore: Heteroglossia as Cross-Cultural Symbolism, Historical Intertextuality, and the Sacred-Secular Dialectic

Within the Bakhtinian framework of heteroglossia, the exogenous narratives, historical allusions, and localized legends embedded in the text function as pivotal nodes for a hypertextual dialogue between the novel and the broader cultural, historical, and theological universe. These pre-existing narrative units—introduced as highly condensed “social idioms” or “ideological registers”—are not mere ornamental appendages; rather, they are “novelized” into dynamic agents that actively participate in the contestation of meaning, the negotiation of identity, and social critique. In Jokha al-Harthi's novels, these discourses traverse the East-West divide—spanning Western modernist aphorisms, classical Arabic anecdotes, and hagiographic folk legends—to weave a dense intertextual web that significantly expands the narrative's dialogic dimension and historical resonance.

First, the invocation of Western canonical literature serves as a conduit for transcultural exchange while interrogating universal themes of gender and intergenerational destiny. In *The Bitter Orange Tree*, a character directly invokes Oscar Wilde's celebrated paradox: “All women become like their mothers. That is their tragedy. No man does. That's his” (Chapter 17, p. 2). The protagonist confesses: “I was terrified of becoming like my mother; that was my tragedy. Christine repeatedly reminded me of Wilde's words.” This act of citation serves as a semiotic marker of intellectual identity, situating the speaker within a globalized intelligentsia capable of navigating and deploying the discourses of Western modernism. Wilde's original aphorism, drawn from *The Importance of Being Earnest* (and echoed in his other works), utilizes Victorian wit to satirize rigid gender roles and the deterministic constraints of inheritance on individual agency. When transposed into the Omani narrative context, its critical edge is recalibrated to address local structural pressures—specifically, the feminine anxiety regarding the recursive nature of traditional life trajectories. This “discourse of the Other,” imbued with Western rationalism and ironic detachment, provides Omani women with an external, universalizing lens to scrutinize their own condition. Consequently, it facilitates a complex internal dialogue concerning the modern subject, the construction of gender, and the weight of ancestral legacy.

Second, the adaptation of classical Arabic historical and literary allusions creates a site for profound intergenerational dialogue and historical irony, effectively anchoring individual destinies within the vessel of collective memory. As previously noted in the discussion on poetry, Zuhair (زهور), the narrator of *The Bitter Orange Tree*, invokes the figure of the beloved consort of the Andalusian monarch Al-Mu'tamid ibn Abbad (المعتمد بن عباد) while recounting

her grandmother's hardships: "Perhaps she was like the wife of Al-Mu'tamid ibn Abbad, who watched the peasant women from the balcony of her palace" (Chapter 8, p. 1). This canonical allusion, traditionally emblematic of courtly indulgence and the aestheticized leisure of the elite, is repurposed here to depict a life defined by visceral labor and marginalization. This creates a potent ironic tension: rather than a mere idealization, the metaphor functions as a "historical poetics" of compassion and critique. By situating a subaltern figure within the semiotic framework of glorious legend, the text utilizes this extreme contrast to expose the systemic erasure of ordinary women—whose lives are often relegated to the peripheral "torrents of history." Through this discursive appropriation, the modern, educated Zuhair orchestrates a temporal bridge to her grandmother, leveraging literature as a tool of protest against unjust historical structures.

Furthermore, the invocation of maxims by local historical figures—specifically rulers—elucidates how economic imperatives permeate and reconstruct the narratives of social hierarchy, resulting in an ideologically heterogeneous symbiosis. In *Silk and the Gazelle*, the narrator recalls a celebrated aphorism attributed to the Emir of Qatar, Muhammad bin Thani (محمد بن ثاني): "مَنْ أَرْفَعُنَا مَنْزِلَةً إِلَىٰ أَدْنَىٰ عَيْدٍ، نَحْنُ جَمِيعًا لَنَا سَيِّدٌ وَاحِدٌ: اللُّؤْلُؤُ" (From the most exalted among us to the lowliest slave, we all serve but one master: the pearl) (p. 85). This monarchical decree reconceptualizes the pearl trade—the economic cornerstone of the pre-petroleum Gulf—as a transcendental "master" that ostensibly levels traditional social stratifications. From a Bakhtinian perspective, this serves as a quintessential example of the interweaving of disparate "social languages": the official discourse of the ruling elite (centripetal force) undergoes a peculiar fusion with the harsh material discourse of economic dependence (centrifugal force). By temporarily suspending the rigid hierarchies of the era, the ruler's discourse masks the reality of class division with a narrative of "shared destiny." This phenomenon vividly illustrates how the economic base reshapes ideological expression during the pearl-diving era, revealing the fragile, dialogic balance between discourses of social fragmentation and the collective pressures of survival.

Finally, localized folk legends—specifically hagiographic narratives surrounding sacred sites—facilitate a fusion of high-order sacred signifiers with the textures of rural life, embodying the exuberant vitality of popular piety. In *Silk and the Gazelles*, the narrative highlights the venerated site known as "كُهْفُ كُوشِ بِنْتِ النَّبِيِّ" (The Cave of the Prophet's Daughter's Footprint) (pp. 43–44). The legend interprets geological indentations on the rock as the physical footprints of Fatima (*Fāṭima bint Muḥammad*), the preeminent female archetype in the Islamic tradition. This narrative serves as a locus of "heteroglossic hybridity," synthesizing abstract, canonical symbols of absolute authority (the purity and divine lineage of the Prophet's daughter) with the most concrete, topographical particularities (rock formations) and the somatic imagination of the populace (the act of walking, the impression of a foot). Through this synthesis, sublime sanctity becomes "embodied" within the desiccated landscape, effectively achieving a "localization" and "democratization" of divine power. Far from a deviation from orthodoxy, this constitutes a centrifugal practice of "Folk Islam." By establishing tangible cartographies of pilgrimage, it embeds faith within the lived geographical space and communal memory, imbuing a harsh environment with spiritual resonance and maternal solace.

In summary, the strategic deployment of disparate narratives, allusions, and legends in al-Harthī's novels is fundamental to constructing a heterogeneous discursive universe. These fragments—derived from divergent temporalities, cultural strata, and ideological spheres—are

woven into the narrative fabric. They engage in a polyphonic dialogue with characters and plot, addressing historical reflections on Oman's social development, economic transitions, and transcultural evolution. This approach not only enriches the text's interpretive density but also demonstrates that the novel's "polyphony" transcends a mere juxtaposition of character voices. Rather, it represents a resonant reconstruction of the entire cultural archive and social discursive field within the crucible of literary form.

5) Linguistic Hybridity: Arabic-English Code-switching as a Heterogeneous Site of Cultural Encounter, Generational Transition, and Ideological Negotiation

Within the Bakhtinian spectrum of heteroglossia, the intersection and amalgamation of disparate linguistic systems within a single text constitute the most visceral and tension-filled phenomenon of "hybridized speech." Jokha al-Harṭī's novels capture a salient feature of the contemporary Omani sociolinguistic landscape: the persistent interweaving of Arabic and English. This code-switching is far from a coincidental linguistic byproduct; rather, it is a profound symptom of "cultural hybridization." It bears the indelible imprint of postcolonial historical memory, reflects the pervasive pressures of globalization, and serves as a semiotic marker of generational schisms and ideological contestation. According to Bakhtinian theory, this linguistic hybridization represents the "centrifugal forces" acting upon the national tongue. By disrupting the singular hegemony of Modern Standard Arabic (the "centripetal force" of national and cultural cohesion), it introduces heterogeneous, globalized registers, thereby forging a transcultural discursive space defined by polyphonic competition and dialogue.

First, the embedding of English lexemes in the vernacular of the youth (e.g., "So what?" and "Let it go") signifies the profound penetration of globalized consumerism, digital media, and individualistic values into the fabric of local life. In *Celestial Bodies*, the dialogue between the younger protagonists, London (لندن) and Hanan (حنان), is punctuated by transliterated English phrases: "سُو وَات؟" (So what?), "Delete, let it go!" (pp. 168, 210). These expressions are not merely superficial linguistic ornaments; they are "ideological freight" carrying specific cultural epistemologies and value orientations. "So what?" encapsulates a modern posture of skepticism and individual alienation, while "Let it go"—resonant with global pop culture and self-help discourse—advocates for emotional liberation and a future-oriented outlook. When Omani youth seamlessly integrate these phrases into their native syntax, a new, hybridized "social dialect" emerges. This linguistic praxis stands in stark relief against the Arabic proverbs favored by the older generation, which are steeped in ancestral wisdom and communal norms. This is not merely a lexical borrowing but a declaration of discursive subjectivity: by appropriating the linguistic signifiers of globalization, the younger generation constructs a system of value judgment that diverges from the parental order, characterized by cosmopolitan sensibilities and an individualistic ethos.

Second, the transliteration of global technological brands and media platforms (e.g., "فيس بوك" and "مُون أرك") anchors the signifiers of global consumer capitalism and digital culture within local narratives, exposing the power dynamics inherent in the transformation of material culture. *Silk and the Gazelles* frequently employs transliterated terms such as "فيس بوك" (Facebook), "السينما" (cinema), and "مُون أرك" (Moon Ark, an audiovisual projection system) (pp. 38, 69, 128). These referents—social media, cinematic spaces, and modern audiovisual hardware—function as material conduits of globalized modernity. Their retention in transliterated form, rather than being fully assimilated through Arabization, stubbornly preserves their Anglo-centric origins, signaling the exogenous nature of these technologies and the ideological structures they represent. As scholar al-Saqri (2019) suggests, language acts as

the "voice of the community" and a "mirror of thought." When Omani youth navigate romantic entanglements via "Facebook" or rural communities engage with "Moon Ark" technology, these English lexemes symbolize the pervasive influence of Western technological capital in reconfiguring Omani social interactions and affective structures. These terms operate as a silent yet potent "discourse of the Other," maintaining a persistent dialectic with local lived experiences and narrative traditions.

Simultaneously, the novel utilizes English expressions to deconstruct and recalibrate traditional authoritative discourses through a "centrifugal" maneuver. For instance, in *Silk and the Gazelles*, the younger generation describes their father as "Baba Cool" (p. 105). Within the traditional Arab domestic sphere, where paternal hegemony and filial piety are paramount, the nomenclature of fatherhood typically necessitates distance, reverence, and an inviolable authority. However, the descriptor "كُول" (Cool), excavated from Western youth subculture, introduces values of egalitarianism, charismatic accessibility, and aesthetic modernity. Applying this epithet to the patriarch constitutes a discursive subversion: it seeks to displace the father from his traditional locus as an "absolute symbol of authority" into the realm of an "evaluable subject" as defined by globalized youth culture. This is not merely a linguistic hybrid but a micro-ideological revolution; a modern, external evaluative system (centrifugal force) is actively challenging and attempting to reconstruct indigenous familial power structures and ethical paradigms (centripetal force). This hybridization creates a high-tension internal dialogue, revealing how universal education and the global flow of information have equipped the nascent generation with a form of cultural capital that triggers profound renegotiations of social hierarchy and intergenerational dynamics.

CONCLUSION

Through a systematic close reading of Jokha al-Harthī's four major novels, this study—situated within the Bakhtinian framework of heteroglossia and polyphony—offers a granular analysis of the intricate linguistic tapestries in her narratives and the profound sociocultural implications they articulate. The research demonstrates that al-Harthī's oeuvre constitutes a discursive arena saturated with heteroglossia. By embedding diverse "socio-linguistic" vectors—ranging from ancestral proverbs and classical verse to theological discourse, historical allusions, and globalized loanwords—al-Harthī transmutes the complexities of Omani historical transition and social metamorphosis into a sophisticated literary medium.

The core findings of this study directly address the initial research questions through three primary dimensions of linguistic diversity:

- 1) **Diachronic Layering and Heterogeneous Synchronicity:** The texts exhibit a profound temporal depth, where poetic discourses from disparate eras—spanning Sufi mysticism and Andalusian courtly elegies to modernist interior monologues and digital-age slang—coexist. This creates a state of "heterogeneous synchronicity," where the ancient and the contemporary engage in an immediate, lived dialogue.
- 2) **Synchronic Stratification and Sociolinguistic Mapping:** The novels manifest a clear social hierarchy through language. The intertwining of classical citations (representing intellectual cultural capital), sacred texts (embodying religious authority), and colloquialisms (crystallizing folk wisdom) with the marginalized voices of former slaves and foreign laborers provides a comprehensive sociolinguistic map of Oman. The addition of English loanwords further signals the encroachment of global consumer culture.

- 3) Cultural Hybridity and Discursive Reshaping: The study identifies a pervasive process of hybridization wherein the authoritative voice of Modern Standard Arabic is consistently interrupted and recalibrated by English lexemes and Western value systems. This generates a dynamic, hybrid linguistic form unique to the contemporary Omani experience.

Ultimately, these elements do not function in isolation; they are woven into a continuous, open-ended network of dialogue. By situating these voices within specific situational contexts—defined by class, education, gender, and generation—al-Harthī’s narratives demonstrate that the “polyphonic” novel is not merely a literary device, but a critical site for the reconstruction of national identity and cultural memory in the face of modernity. Second, regarding the socio-humanistic significance of heteroglossia, this study argues that its core value manifests on three distinct levels: the polyphonic archiving of cultural memory, the democratic praxis of the novelistic form, and the dynamic cartography of social metamorphosis. al-Harthī’s writing deliberately resists any singular, monolithic cultural narrative. Instead, she elevates voices marginalized by official historiography—the lived experiences of former slaves, the ancestral wisdom of rural women, indigenous local knowledge, and the perspectives of the subaltern—to the epicenter of literary representation, thereby achieving a counter-archival preservation of memory.

Crucially, al-Harthī harnesses the inherent democratic potential of the novel as a genre, transforming her text into a discursive microcosm of the “public sphere.” This enables divergent ideological stances—such as Asma challenging gendered constraints through *Hadith*, Zarfah seeking discursive refuge in proverbs, and the youth negotiating identities through English lexemes—to engage and collide on an equal footing. Ultimately, the linguistic friction and evolution within the novel—whether through the functional shifts of proverbs, the secular appropriation of sacred discourse, or the inscription of identity via loanwords—meticulously map a dynamic topography of Omani society’s turbulent transition from tradition to modernity. Linguistic flux has thus become the most acute semiotic indicator for observing the fragmentation of social structures, the realignment of values, and the ongoing reconstruction of both individual and collective identities.

THEORETICAL CONTRIBUTIONS AND BROADER IMPLICATIONS

On a theoretical level, this study applies Bakhtinian frameworks of heteroglossia and polyphony to a quintessential postcolonial, non-Western context of female authorship. In doing so, it not only validates the cross-cultural interpretive power of these theories but also expands their conceptual reach by emphasizing heteroglossia as both a “battleground of ideological contestation” and a “medium for fluid identity negotiation.” In practical terms, this research offers a robust case study for understanding how contemporary Arab fiction—particularly Gulf literature—engages in social critique and cultural introspection through narrative innovation. It demonstrates that al-Harthī’s achievement lies not only in the narration of Omani stories but in the creation of a narrative vernacular that mirrors the profound complexity of Omani society itself.

Ultimately, through her exceptional literary practice, Jokha al-Harthī proves that the vitality of the novel stems from its capacity to accommodate “hybrid speech.” By juxtaposing the rural and the urban, the traditional and the modern, the sacred and the secular, and the local and the global—allowing them to interrogate and illuminate one another within a literary *chronotope*—she has aesthetically replicated the richness, contradictions, and vibrant energy of Oman at this historical crossroads. This study confirms that her work represents a milestone

in the modernization of Omani literature, providing a resonant, polyphonic text for a global audience to grasp the destinies of communities during periods of radical cultural transition. Future research may extend this analytical framework to the broader corpus of contemporary Arab fiction, exploring how heteroglossic narrative has emerged as a universal poetic strategy for postcolonial societies to articulate the multifaceted nature of their cultural identities.

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