# The Islamic Novel Style and Structure

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Professor Aliyu Kamal was the recipient of the Umar Ladan Prize as the best student in 1982; and in 2005 he won the ANA/Chevron Prize for the Novel, *Fire in My Backyard*. Professor Kamal was the Editor, *FAIS Journal of Humanities*, 2009-2011; Editor, *Al-Ijtihad*, the Journal of the International Institute of Islamic Thought, 2005; Managing Editor, *WAJILLAC*, 1999-2003; Head of English Department, 2009-2011; Editor, the Triumph Literary Workshop, 1985-2003. He has supervised Thirty (30) B.A. and Seventeen (17) M.A. Dissertations. He has attended several conferences, seminars and workshops and presented scholarly papers. Professor Kamal has moderated a PhD Thesis and an M.A Dissertation in Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria. In addition to three (3) Creative Writing works in progress, Professor Aliyu Kamal has published Eight (8) articles in Journals, Eleven (11) works/creative writings, and with other authors Three (3) books in Language and Linguistics. This extensive publication in language and linguistics forms the thrust of this lecture.

The paper discusses the Islamic Novel from the ways it shares some aspects of fictional writing with the English Novel and from the ways the two forms of literature diametrically oppose each other. Some of the aspects they share include being multidisciplinary and entertaining the reader, while the two literary forms differ greatly on the question of religion, especially in thematic treatment. To that end, the preoccupations of characters are either shown to diverge from religion, as in the English Novel, or bind to religious precepts, as in the Islamic Novel. Whereas individualism is stressed in the former, the latter projects communalism – and thus portrays the individualist character as exclusive, diversionary and egocentric – character traits likely to harm the relations holding between characters. Yet, by being neutral, the English language, as a vehicle of literary expression, has a great deal of stylistic devices to offer to the Islamic Novel. This is shown in the analysis of eleven novels written over a ten-year period.

**The English Novel**

Quoting Virginia Woolf, Eagleton (2005:1ff) stresses that the English Novel is the most pliable of all literary forms, as it cannibalises and mixes other literary models, such as drama, epic, satire, history and tragedy. Its major themes are sex and property, money and marriage, social mobility and the nuclear family, while 'pre-modern' themes forms like myth, fable, folktale and romance are mixed in with 'modern' ones like realism, reportage and psychological investigation. The English Novel is associated with the Middle Class who dream of total freedom from restraint in a world in which the aristocratic order is dead. Everything is thus permitted in that atheistic world – a world in which the English Novel, an anarchic genre that recognises no rules, is wary of the abstract and the eternal and believes in the concrete or what one can taste and touch. The English Novel is thus nervous of religious debate, but is mindful of change. "It is committed to a present always in the process of change" (Eagleton: 2005:6), making it a discourse of the present.

Being secular, investigative and suspicious of authority, the English Novel is like science, portraying a secular empirical world by focusing on culture. It is self-authorizing, non-conformist and no longer depends on custom, mythology, religion or community. Rather, it is a product of modernity, which is a period characterized by disagreement on fundamental values and beliefs fragmented and discordant – a period

sceptical of all authoritarian claims to truth. Although focused on the common life, the English Novel has a negative identity. "Values are at their worse diverse and conflicting" (Eagleton: 2005:4) amidst a rise in individualism, which rejects collective paradigms as too constricting. As a result, characters are cast as vulgar and grotesque and criticised for being elitist.

Writing along those lines, the English novelist conveys fantasy rather than moral truths out of the belief that the ordinary reader delights in the exotic and the extravagant, the mo0nstrous and the miraculous. The writer selects, transposes, rearranges and edits and argues for change by compellingly dramatizing what is wrong. Nevertheless, the form and content of the English Novel are hard to reconcile because "its reflection of a contingent haphazard world continually threatens to undercut its coherences as a piece of fiction" (Eagleton: 2005:14-15). That is why the modern novel gives "a kind of empty signifier of a totality which is no longer possible" Ibid, p.19). The nature of the English Novel notwithstanding, it provides a great deal of hints the Islamic Novel can draw on to be very much of a good job.

**The Islamic Novel**

As a literary form, it tackles any serious topic or discipline in whose pursuit men and women amass knowledge and impart it to those interested to know, making the writing undertaking partly enlightenment and partly entertainment. The writer maintains a balance between the two by the choice of suitable themes that have a bearing on *mu'malat* (or human relations) and a deft handling of the task at hand, such that the reader is easily persuaded that the reading is worth their time and effort and is not done just for pleasure alone.

Style and Structure

The style of the Islamic Novel, which concerns the treatment of the major aspects of the Muslim Life, gives shape and structure to this literary form. As reported in a prophetic hadith (or pronouncement), the main preoccupation of the Muslim is the fear of God and the cultivation of impeccable manners. Since the novelist's work, as argued by Henry James (Cunliff:1964:217), is made up and depends on manners, customs and habits, the Islamic novelist has an endless array of themes to draw on of impeccable manners. His interpretation must ne couched on deep knowledge of such manners before depicting characters who give them expression. As stressed by Edith Wharton (Cunliff: 1964:225), "Every

great novel must first of all be based on a profound sense of moral values." On the part of the critic, a critique of the Islamic Novel can be based ion the disciplines of knowledge, which inform the novelist's choice of themes.

. History and Mythology

Published in 2003, *Hausaland* (Kamal, 2003) portrays the Fulani Jihadist conquest of Ilorin through the protagonist, Fillo, a herdsman whose sojourn into southern Nigeria hypothesis what could have happened had the jihadists travelled down to the sea:

> Dusk was falling when I slipped out of Lorin. Already crickets had begun their night-song, and would continue with it until all the weary but victorious warriors had gone to sleep. Birds, content after feeding for the whole day, flew into their nests, squawking and flapping their wings as they fought over nice tree perches. Their chicks, tired of waiting for food, chirped repeatedly as the bigger birds, their throats bulging with regurgitated food, dipped their beaks deeply into those of the hungry broods. While the birds settled down, other winged creatures came out and flew about in the sky. Bats, roused from their long daylight sleep by crickets, shrilled as they flew in and out of a noisy swarm of mosquitoes, which hanged suspended in the air. By the time the sun disappeared from view, the birds had quieted down, and the bats, after eating their fill of insects, had flown away to search for something else. The wind, no longer heated by the sun, gradually cooled down and blew gently through the trees, bringing with it the faint cries of night animals rushing towards the rotting corpses abandoned on the battlefield. But the sky did not remain dark for long. The moon was soon out, its light brightening slowly as it lit up the whole land below. *The land had nothing to hide.* Rats and mice scurried about searching for food, while others dived into the grass to escape from a hooting owl. For the superstitious, the ominous call of the owl was the most frightening of all the sounds of the night. The day was over, but the owl wasn't announcing its close. Rather it was announcing the end of Shehu's dynasty. (*Hausaland*: 167-68)

The description is optimistic, as shown in the moon lighting up the whole land below. The style isn't preachy but entertaining, especially about the supposedly origins of the Hausa people and Fulani cattle, and fantastical, or Fillo's search of a man with a snake in his belly/ Mungo Park's disappearance is traced to a flood brought about by a monster losing its life. Thus, through fantasy and entertainment certain fundamental principles of Islam (devotion to the Divine and to marriage; hard work and friendship)

are presented, as well as a contrast between the Islamic and the non-Islamic ways of life:

> "…Our gods live in the sky amidst a cloud of flies."
> "Why flies?"
> "Whatever we offer in sacrifices gets to them rotten." (*Hausaland*: 176-77)

Environmentalism

Umar-Faruq Adam, an ecologist, tries to slow down the advance of the Sahara Desert in *Fire in My Backyard* (Kamal, 2004) upon the realization "that his choice of what to do after getting his degree could not be opting for anything other than … what the environment, as it was turned barer, drier and starker by the minute had evidently shown as an urgent need for sustainable utilization" (P.4). As an environmentalist, his commitment to life is communal, rather individualistic. "(H)e saw the need to suppress individualism in favour of communal choice, to work for the common good, rather than the triumph of the individual will" (p.117). For an ecologist, his conscience is poised on religion, such that when he goes into the bush to conduct research, he becomes so conscious that he must pray and does so:

> He had from the age seven began religiously to receive the regulation beating not only for delaying his prayers, which attracted the punishment, but for acting in ways Father put down, in his phrase, to senselessness. *One kind of madness often ensues with prolonged spitting.* Father likened offences to Satanism, calling offenders satanic or devils and beating them to instil some sense in them and force the Devil out of them. (*Fire in My Backyard*, 2004:103)

In contrast, his older brother, Sadiq, who studied engineering in Russia and becomes Marxist, "… a freethinker; he was never seen to pray; he would rather do something else" (p.109). Away from the detractive influence of the engineer, "he … (begins) to behave like his former self when, while staying at the family home, he used to observe the five daily prayers – and feel it heavily on his mind if he even delayed, much less failed, to observe any" (p.110). The novel structured in such a way that Umar-Faruq is shown recalling being taught constancy and steadfastness in prayer as part of strict upbringing, which are strengthened by the girl he courts to marry. Sadiq abandoned his parents his parents and worships not Allah but the motor engine, ideas which are strengthened by the loose women he socializes

with. They thus refuse to meet his religious-minded brother as a deceptive sign of apology for leading life on the fast lane:

> On his arrival at midnight, she had quickly gone indoors and led the returnee to reject as false the assumption that she was being modest about it all; that she felt ashamed to appear wanting (in terms of wealth and in terms of morals) in front of a total stranger. It occurred to him that it was more to do with her poor style, her lack of finesse, which, as a corroboration of her indeterminacy about indulging in the flesh trade, hinted at the misgivings of the young scientist. It was that, even in the likelihood of being wrong about the shady female character, her early departure would fail as an invitation to draw Sadiq away to her odorous nakedness. (*Fire in My Backyard*, 2004:245)

As part of the success of communal over individual ethic, the ecologist succeeds in the end by reconciling punitive father and wayward son.

Politics

Whether one pursues Western or Islamic education, politics is best played on the basis of sound moral values. Faruqu Ladan drops out of the Qur'anic School in *No Sweat* (Kamal 2013). The boy has been assigned to the pious Imam to turn him into a scholar. At the Imam's death, his son, Sadi, a man of the world, charges an affluent contractor and orders his pupils to pray for a greater increase of the wealth of Alhaji Mairodi. Compared to the Imam's asceticism, Sadi sybariticism badly affects the boy's studies:

> The boy marvelled at the delicacies eaten at Sadi's house. Rice, spaghetti and sweet potatoes were common everyday fare. But most importantly, every meal was served with meat; when on rare occasions chicken was served, Faruqu got to eat the heads and the feet – as well as the intestines, though Saude relished the liver. The boy also got the bones Sadi and Saude failed to chew – and made small work of them (*No Sweat*, 2013:43).

Poor supervision leads Faruqu to the red-light district and into the employment of Magajiya, an unmarried food-seller who leads him to a corrupt local government chairman, who in turn colludes with Mairodi to appropriate a filling station belonging to the local council. Tarred with the same brush of corruption, Faruqu furnishes his sisters' rooms on their marriage with the money drawn from public coffers. The enormity of the deed vitiates his act of filial piety of giving his mother money gifts when he visits her. People disregard religion only in what a character, who goes to

forcibly draw away his married sister from it – the "tributary of sin" or the red-light district "where everybody minded their own business and one could do what he or she wanted without anyone as much as raise an eyebrow" (p. 96). It is made up transvestites, unmarried and runaway married women and corrupt contractors and public employees. Never the less, Faruqu's line of thinking shows the strong possibility of a turnaround to a life free from corruption:

> Other than throwing money around, corpulence paints a picture of the comfortable life in the Nigerian imagination, leading Faruqu to believe that an umpteenth number of people found it difficult to have the three square meals. He recalled the youths who descended on the district council office as a political vanguard to have their mercenary wishes satisfied by the hapless Chairman. Partially educated and lacking any useful skills to make themselves useful to the community, they scandalized his senses of propriety and decorum by pursuing politics as a trade, a vocation that has no fixed hours of work, no fixed address, nor any work itself, nothing to build on, add or subtract, giving one, at best, no ideas to even have the faintest inclination to begin to consider doing anything sensible and, at worst, not even doing that, but just becoming a nuisance and giving people, forced to interact with him, the allowance to hope fervently to be rid of his baleful influences and provided with an alternative. That would at least make life worth living by acting to the contrary (*No Sweat*, 2013:97).

In politics, people suffer the bad effects of secularism, with egocentricity leading kleptocracy:

> "...Politicians scoop up the largest share of our riches and throw us crumbs to justify our belief that they fix their own salaries and guard it so secretly that so far no one can guess how much they cart away home at month-end as their 'legitimate' pay. Take me, for instance. I fear the next rainy season. This broken down house could easily be washed away at the first heavy downpour. All the rooms leak like a sieve; the unpaved compound will turn to mud, while the pit-latrine will become a no-go area when the logs laid across are washed away. Recently, steams rising from the gaps between the logs attracted my wayward son, who played truant. He seized the opportunity to snip at ease and get high until I caught him at it and flayed his skin. His brothers told me later that he had switched to the liquid solution bicycle mechanics use to vulcanize punctures. What can one do? My scrap of a farm in the village doesn't harvest enough corn and millet to last us a year. A

> year?" he laughed in anger, rather than humour. "At most, the yield will last a month. What will tide me over the remaining eleven months? Yet, I hear of politicians sending their children to attend primary and secondary schools outside the country. *Why should the hyena suffer blows while its* gardi *handler appropriates all the money?*" (*No Sweat*, 2013:107)

*Mu'malat* or Human Relations

Manners make the man. Because Muslims are enjoined to cultivate impeccable manners in their dealings with one another, Audi Adam (Kamal, *Life Afresh*, 2013:5-6) believes "in fairness in dealing with people without infringing their rights." This philosophy of life is stressed in early childhood. On his way to boarding secondary school, Jumare Gambo is reminded of it by his father:

> Pray five times daily - with the morning one, just like we do here, at the Muezzin's second prayer-call at dawn, and not after the sun has risen up, when Satan will mock you, for getting up late and losing all the bounties of the dawn, by facing you as you stand up to prayer, with the sun climbing slowly up between his two giant horns" (*Kamal*, The Blaming Soul, 2005c:12).

It determines human character by becoming second nature to Mujahid Yusuf:

> His major aim in life was the reformation of the self, so that the self and the training he put it through would become one. He held the view, for a young man knowledgeable of ethics, that a firm and moral character was a guarantee for him and the society at large to establish and upkeep a civilized community. For a society held in thrall by some of its members bent on destroying it, so that they could gain, grin and gloat from the debacle, the task before him was to stitch the tears in the garment of the community in order to enhance the decency and the greatness of the greater society. That garment of the society was in tatters and those detractors were already at work – widening the series of rents in it by poking their dirty fingers through the holes (Kamal, *A Possible World*, 2008:76).

He leads his life in tandem with religious worship; for him, eating at fixed times is the same as praying at fixed times. Every action of his is tempered by religion in the order supererogatory Qur'anic recitation at dawn, obligatory prayers, the world news and "coffee at its best" (p.46). Islam is

complete way of life affecting the decisions that Maje Auta makes to lead his own life:

> He returned home at exactly 4.30pm and parked the car in the garage. As he locked the garage door, he could hear the Muezzin at the corner mosque calling out loud and clear, "*Allahu akbar*" (Allah is the greatest), as the Imam led the late-afternoon prayer. Maje Auta decided, as he walked the short distance home, to say his payers before sitting down to lunch. If he sat down immediately to eat, he would have to get up and pray at a time when he would very much prefer to remain in a recumbent posture – taking it easy after so long a day at the office. But if he offered his prayers first then he could rest until it was time for the sunset Maghrib prayer (Kamal, *Women Without Borders*, 2010:1).

In such a life, even cheerful bantering is allowed between friends in mundane activities, such as eating:

> "What is wrong with *santi*?" Bala continues, taking a drink. "Mealtimes after all are times of joy and conviviality," he adds after a mild belch.
> "I agree with you," says Audi. "I heard of a hadith that encourages conversations during meals, as keeping quiet is Jewish, which we are not supposed to be" (*Life Afresh*, 2012:79).

Religious and ordinary lives are complimentary. Members of the community, like Hajjo Gano's uncle, who cleave to the good, belong to a select group on whom the society depends:

> Father was very concerned about the respect he commanded in the locality. On the religious side, no one, from the Ward Head to the Imam and the ordinary household heads, would disprove the fact that Uncle Ilu observed all the five daily prayers at the corner mosque. He would always be found either in the front row or in the second. Whatever the case may be, he never failed to find a place in the first three choice rows behind the Imam. He was wont to say voluntary *nafilat* prayers before each obligatory one or thereafter with the notable exception of the mid-afternoon Asr prayer for which no precedent had reportedly been set in a hadith by Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) to be deserving of emulation (Kamal, *Hausa Girl*, 2010:67-68).

Such characters, the conscience of the society, are very conscientious and kept in line by their conscience, such as Mujahid who

> had felt very conscious of his get up (shirt and trousers) at the congregational prayer, such that he discretely avoided the front rows of worshippers standing directly behind the Imam. He joined the fourth, which contained a handful of young men attired in the same fashion as him. The Imam, a very strict *malam* known for his piety and great sense of propriety, had once firmly ordered a youth with a bare head to move to the back row and let someone wearing a cap fill in the gap (*A Possible World*, 2008:179).

A similarly inclined character, Hajjo Gano, makes recourse to human psychology to size up people before deciding how to interact with them:

> As she approached her teens, Hajjo had come to appreciate that element of homespun wisdom, which is that nowadays people rather than animals attract the attention one heretofore turned on his or her favourite pets. She realized that one got on well with people by knowing thoroughly about them, by determining their moods and motives, especially in respect to one or of others whose dealings with that person would lead him or her to believe in such a way as to enable the person interested in them, as Hajjo Gaji, paint an accurate character sketch of them (Kamal, *Hausa Girl*, 2010:37-38).

A clean conscience leads to the development and cultivation of the purity ethic, which invests Yunus Idris with the charisma of authority:

> Haji Yunus' singular intent to observe the purity ethic, something that earned him, along with the Imam, the Muezzin and the Ward Head, the esteemed position of a pillar of the society, prevented "the wretch" from approaching him for money to pay for "a shot" or heroine or cocaine. The youth always quailed before the presence and had on many occasions given the landowner the benefit of catching sight of the addict, who, on seeing the august gentleman approach, "turned tail" and disappeared into the crowd or down a labyrinthine alley, make a hasty retreat (Kamal, *Portrait of a Patron*, 2006a:207).

His demeanour makes him comparable to the pious Imam. Jumare Gambo goes further to eschew evil by way of self-reproach:

> He blamed himself for his steadfastness, his purity of heart, in his rejection of corruption, of the cankers of native custom, of

> innovation in deportment. That purity of heart, if he were to consider it pleasurable, would lead him to error, to self-conceit – an excrescence, a veil, as the Imam put it, over the greater illumination (*The Blaming Soul*, 2005c:52).

Where no reference is made to religion, such as in *Silence and a Smile* (Kamal, 2005:51), it is Ashiru Lawal and Hamidu smoking cannabis hidden in the toilet or Ashiru confronting half-brother Sadiq, who removed a light bulb from the room of the former, leading to an altercation full of vituperation and abuse. In the end, their father makes recourse to Islam to make peace between them.

Other characters use religion for certain ulterior motives, such as Alhaji Malle (*Silence and a Smile*) insisting for a kinship marriage of cousins even though Dija Garba loves a non-relative, Ashiru Lawal. Her uncle denies her the religious freedom to choose in retaliation against her suitor's brother who, refuses to offer that senior relatives contracts under the table. In the end, she marries Zakiy but deserts him before consummation and has to be allowed to marry the man she loves.

One other form of hypocrisy involves Mujahid Yusuf's mother who arranges his marriage with the daughter of an affluent friend in anticipation of the marriage gift the bride will bring along to the husband's house:

> She didn't have much respect for Mujahid's staying single two years after his graduation and national service. Marriage in a respectable family – respectable translated as well to do for her – would provide other opportunities for relief. There was the *gara* gift usually sent over from the parental house of the daughter-in-law that the modest pay check of a civil servant could not purchase on a regular basis. The awareness that respectability – her sense of the word – could attract respectability on an equal basis against which her humble status and Mujahid's modest one would come up short, led Mother to consider her childhood friend's daughter a safe bet (*A Possible World*:2008:3).

Other than using religion for their own ends, other characters, such as Sadisu Gangan, hearken wholly to the native culture, but only to the illusory dispensable aspects of it:

> What dash there was in that gentleman's handling of his wealth conformed to the antics of the traditionally-minded Hausaman for whom life is a bash the enjoyment of which hints at heedlessness – the imbiber of pleasure has no time to think of the morrow – rather than sound good sense – profligacy would give no room for the pleasure seeker to have even an inkling of the apprehension of

> the idea of the sense of abstinence or moderation – all of which help to turn the tables against him: his life is reduced to a theatre with him as the only stand up comedian performing to a select audience. The likes of which latter, in the case of Sadisu, doubled as the local grapevine to whose tunes he strutted his own stuff for onward transmission to all and sundry with such creativity that both player and audience turned out to depend on one another (*Portrait of a Patron*, 2006a:36-37).

Illusion leads Sadisu to frivolity of marrying and divorcing women at will; it finally forces him to lead his life according to the dictates of panegyrists, who make it out that that is the best way forward for him.

Gender Warfare

The relationship between the sexes crackles with tension and things easily come to a head, leading to conflict, misunderstanding and disapproval. In *The Blaming Soul* (2010:39ff), Juma's "only quarrel with (her husband) was that he paid scant attention to native culture, especially to what was innovative in human deportment … resist(ing) the intrusion of change." On his part, "Jumare … was always on the look out for changes in feminine cultural etiquette … (b)ut (Juma) instead preferred to follow the example of fellow women, rather than adhere to the ideals of Jumare, in her observation of culture … (and) … thus have no fear of ridicule, of going against the feminine strain, of always choosing native tradition over decorum." Jumare believes that "women must respect the customary. They believed it was in keeping with decorum – their understanding of decorum, what sense of it they could make." Implicitly, they hardly don't understand decorum and only hearken to what they misunderstand of it, which is often seen when "violating cultural mores, rather than religious precepts, stung (them) to the quick – such that they put up an uproar until they had their way."

The female Hausa dress code often causes conflict between husbands and wives. Biriji Kawu, in *Women Without Borders*, adheres to the culture of fashion in vogue outside her marital home and disregards her husband, Maje Auta's interests by not dressing for his own pleasure. Yet, she still resents Maje's becoming attracted to the beautifully dressed women he sees outdoors. That is exactly what happens, leading to serious consequences:

> Inevitably, he compared the two women. Jinjin: elegant, odoriferous, with a skin complexion that tended to the light. Biriji: dowdy, inconspicuous and absentminded as she attended to her infant child. It was all he could to draw his eyes away from Jinjin.

> He felt enamoured of her like a cockerel that sees a hen close by and goes pierrotting around her with the tips of a wing trailing the ground. Maje was yet again like an amorous male pigeon that immediately begins to coo when isolated with a female pigeon by a seller, whose customer wants to buy a male and a female pair (*Women Without Borders*, 2010:106).

Gender conflict underpins strict male adherence to religion and female strict observance of culture. After Biriji and Maje have a misunderstanding, her mother summons her home without informing her daughter's father beforehand. He makes his criticism of such a move very emphatic, moderating it with religious truths and counsels her that "in everything you do, consider religion first – and you will never err or go astray" (p. 95). When matters come to a head, there is no mincing of words:

> "None of those two great books will support what you did. Thus, on the basis of that you are in error. Nor have you consulted me before you took that rash action. Biriji is my daughter. I know she is your daughter, too, but in our patrilineal society I exercise greater control over her than you. So listen to this: to avoid making me angrier than I am now, go and escort her back to her husband's house. Come back the moment you hand her over to him – don't dawdle on the way. And I may as well tell you this: never ever act rashly again. By Allah, if you do, I will divorce you. Rushing off home after a slight misunderstanding earned you a severe beating in my presence. How will the gentleman who dealt the blows react if you show him your divorce letter? I am not trying to patronize you. I am just encouraging you to toe the Islamic line (Women *Without Borders*, 2010:82)."

Making recourse to the religious angle, Alti Kawu argues that men have the upper hand, as women often act without deliberation to the detriment of those they think they are acting in favour for.

Yet, virulent criticism of male to male can be more devastating, especially if it originates from a man's falling out of turn by condoning female strict compliance to the dispensable aspects of native culture:

> "Maje, you have shown that you are despicable – and beneath contempt. I have never imagined that you would behave so shamefully, so carelessly and so senselessly. A married man having sex with an unmarried woman. Whatever drew you helplessly to Jinjin? Why didn't you make enquiries before you became hopelessly infatuated with her? You turned deaf ears to the counsel of Prophet Muhammad, upon who be peace. What does Jinjin have that Biriji lacks? Nothing. Why didn't you

> transfer your attraction for Jinjin to Biriji? Since there is no trial more injurious to man than woman, what does Biriji do that you find so intolerable as to find peace of mind elsewhere? ... Women like Jinjin and Indo live beyond borders. Proverbially, they go beyond the farm broadcasting seeds. At best, they compete with us for greatness; at worse they plot for us men to fail and suffer woefully for it. ... Your dangerous liaison with Jinjin has put my innocent daughter's life at the gravest danger. Your own life is your own problem. I no longer care about it. Jinjin is rumoured to have HIV/AIDS. Therefore, I will not allow Biriji to follow you home unless you bring me a clean bill of health from the City Teaching Hospital to prove that Jinjin has not infected you with the deadly disease. If you happen to be infected, don't you dare, don't you ever come back to this house again (*Women Without Borders*, 2010: 174-175)".

Women's declaration of the independence of behaviour also deepens, especially in the case of the women's staying single. Umar-Faruq Adam comes across

> women not native to the locality had sworn off marriage. Having fled their places of birth and taking new names, they settled in the red-light district. They tried, in an effort to attract night-time pleasure seekers, to appear clean and pretty. Jarmai admitted, in his phraseology, in one of his rare successes at eloquence, that he "knew some of the women as female". Other than scorning decorum, their declaration for independence turned out, for Umar-Faruq, to be the removal of the veil and the open association, on an equal basis, with members of the opposite sex. It was here alone that the young ecologist saw Hausa women wielding power over the chauvinist male. He could like all Rumbu tolerate their vanity which, nevertheless, had a basis in human intercourse, in what some considered normal behaviour. Yet it lacked credibility. It was fleeting. It attracted a lot of abuse for the women (*Fire in My Backyard*, 2004:98).

His interpretation of female behaviour is here related to religious mores to make his assessment fair, sound and accurate. To show that she lacks "that of the eye – in a word, shame" (p. 192), one of the women forces herself on him. Dela has no respect for Umar-Faruq, nor he for her, leading to his rejection of her.

Bad manners can be cultivated right from adolescence, especially from the medium of film, as shown in the case of Hajjo Gano (*Hausa Girl*, 2010:80ff). By avidly watching Hausa films, she is accused of bad manners when she behaves insolently to some visitors to the house. Her stepmother

tells her that "respectable women look up to men in polite society. Gentlemen of high repute reciprocate the gesture by acting accordingly. Those who choose to behave otherwise are often instigated by women of low morals, who female actresses depict in Hausa films. It is therefore irrelevance, rather than sound morals, that attracted you to the films." Irrelevance rather than sounds morals attracts the girl to film watching, which is counter to the claim that "respect is all there is to life" (p. 80-81). She must watch films with a critical eye in order not to jeopardize her parents' wish for her to attract a devout suitor with whom she can join hands to purify the society and help maintain its status of purification.

Nevertheless, a film director, Sonkowa, turns her dream into reality and casts her in a film – but at the same time hypnotizes her before having his way with her:

> For one who had fallen under a spell, she could now be made to act contrary to her own moral standards. She felt no qualms. The treatment was a covering of the eyes. Her altered state made her feel that she was a child all over again. She could thus act anyhow regardless of caution, censure (*Hausa Girl*, 2010:217).

As a result, Hajjo is condemned by the community as "the cursed one" for showing the bad manners of an actress. She offers her hand to Kabiru Badayi, but he utterly rejects the offer and announces his impending marriage with a girl of sound morals:

> "The daughter of the learned Mullah who helped to cure you from hypnosis. He has accepted my proposal to marry her. The marriage will be solemnized next week. She excels you in everything. For me, Zeenat's beauty ranks a lowly second to her beautiful manners. She will help me in my recitation and memorization of the Holy Qur'an. What about you? You may be beautiful but you are a degenerate empty-head. As SK's leftover, you can disappear from the face of the earth for all I care.... Goodbye, Hajjo Gano – and good riddance to bad rubbish" (*Hausa Girl*, 2010:250).

Men also bend their anger against women indirectly by attacking, say, the cultural trappings of marriage that women are so concerned about. Tasi Bello (Kamal, *Hausa Boy*, 2011:145) "could boldly violate feminine cultural pretensions to get what he wanted out of life. Violation would mean doing things out of order." Having no money to purchase it, he skims off Uncle Nadudu's money and buys a trousseau for his daughter to show that it isn't biding on him for being "a cultural innovation imposed by

women who delighted to see men squirm" (p. 91). To make a more devastating attack on women, the Hausa boy also pays his cousin's dowry from her father's money.

Narrative Style

Like the English Novel, the Islamic Novel has several styles of telling a story to choose from, the most common being narrative, as in the opening of *Hausaland*:

> On the southern Nigerian coast I worked as a seller of charms. My encounter with the peoples of the south, the Nkam and the Nyam, wouldn't have been possible if I hadn't heard a story about a man and a snake. In the tale, the snake, which was pursued by youths armed with sticks, persuaded the man to let it hide in his belly. Afterwards, the snake refused to come out of the man's huge belly, making him feel sick (*Hausaland*, 2003:1).

Fillo tells the story in the first person and shows that is involves adventure and the fantasy of a quest often relayed in a folktale.

The Islamic Novel is also written in expository prose or in a style more expository than narrative. Umar-Faruq, the ecologist, describes the vegetation as he sets out on a scientific research undertaking. As narrative, the description begins in the past tense, but it turns scientific by deftly changing to the present tense:

> The six-month-old dry season had dehydrated the vegetation cover, making the grass ignitable. It had likewise, as it ran through its reign, dried the herbaceous vegetation down to the level of the soil. The transpiration cycle normally begins with the decline in the moisture content of the grass-leaf cells after which dryness begins at the tip of the leaf, going progressively down to the base and turning the leaves yellowish-brown. Dry-leaf sheaths in the bunch grass, Umar-Faruq reasoned, protect the lower regions from total desiccation, such that the grass can resist even the harshest draught-spell for some weeks. Yet such dry grass lacks Vitamin A (carotene), which it loses to the bleaching. It also lacked phosphorous, causing weight loss in the quadrupeds that graze on it. Their feeding regimen is characterised by low energy intake, low protein intake and, at worst, low energy gain (*Fire in My Backyard*, 2004:59-60).

The writer has the choice to tell the whole story in the present tense. The opening of *Life Afresh*:

> Many forms of life correspond with the best or the worst choices that individuals make to lead their own lives.
>
> For one who has the right of choice and so the freedom to it, Dijengala Maikano wants to lead her life her own way. Of the two options, one is recommended by the society and the other, a figment of her imagination. As someone who thinks for herself, she is none the less aware of the Hausa adage concerning choice a self-imposition is much more painful than the barbs of slavery (*Life Afresh*, 2013:1).

It starts with a claim that is not only general, but relates specifically to Dijengala as well. Such a style is comparable to a film on a current theme in which the viewer has the impression that the events happen even as he or she watches the film unfold. Thus, the present tense gives the story a sense of immediacy in the currency of events that strikes the reader as timeless and literature being indeed a mirror to the society more persuasive than a rendition in the past tense. Told in the third person like Fire, the omniscient narrator drapes a garb of neutrality as enjoined by a hadith and resorts to allusion and instead of calling names, ascribes bad deeds to nameless perpetrators:

> For a consolation, a divorced wife will still benefit if she has any children. But the greatest loser is the childless elderly divorcee. She hardly ever marries again and, in a macho society where the likes of her attract as much respect as what is shown to second-hand merchandise, she has to avail herself of the charity of close or distant relatives who will condescendingly tolerate her until she breathes her last (*Hausa Girl*, 2010:44-45).

Criticism serves as a way to identify with the victim. Mujahid Yusuf's criticism of women is presented in stream of consciousness mode:

> As the vanquished, women only succeed in instigating the feeling of outrage in men. They find a consolation by participating in the most important, as well as the most legitimate activity, or the solemnization of the marriage. Attendance at it isn't required for members of the second sex. From their antics, by throwing their combined weight around, from the manner they strutted their stuff, the absence of premeditation in their deliberations – Mujahid felt that he could hardly be wrong in saying that feminine deportment lacked charity. It had no greater purpose than to put men to inconvenience (*A Possible World*, 2008:186).

The currency of his views is shown in the present tense, while the possibility of the erroneousness of those views is rendered in the past tense – perhaps to show that those views could be debatable.

## Language Use

### *"Literary" Grammar*

Grammar can become "literary" from the way the writer deploys it as part of utilizing a form of literary licence that he or she has at his disposal:

> Yet again not all the tenants, graduates mostly but with lapsed hopes of ever continuing with their education, showed a tolerable attitude to dirty and unkempt surroundings. Mujahid Yusuf, a stickler for propriety living on the ground floor, attracted the envy and the gibe of his immediate neighbours staying up or adjacent to him for his insistence, which they strove to undermine, to live in clean surroundings. His flat was the cleanest of the all the two dozen scattered over three floors. The uncharitableness of his neighbours in colluding with the owners of the flats on top of him to live in squalor served as a symbol of his failure in the eyes of his mother. They threw down their rubbish and filthy water on his door-front in their efforts to claim him as one of their dirty clique. They succeeded in making starkly clear to him his widowed mother's complaint that he had failed to make something of himself. That he had failed to improve her life. That he had failed to prevent her from subscribing to the view that he might after all never get on in life (*A Possible World*: 2008:2).

The two *that*-clauses that end the sentence perform the function of the independent clause by way of stacking to achieve greater emphasis. This will be weakened or even lost if the three dependent clauses are strung into a longer sentence.

### *The Long Sentence*

A very important aspect of narration in the Islamic Novel is the use of language concerning the sentence – both the long and the short. The long sentence, which starts from 21+ words (Kameen, 1983/89:165), is an index of syntactic maturity (Hunt, 1969, 1970, 1977).

> The girl, nubile, unlettered, her station in life determined by a mother insistent on saving face and raising enough money to buy her daughter marriage gifts for which no husband would show any

> gratitude for being forced to bear the cost of presenting the girl a set of trousseaux; the provision of which might force him into debt and turn him into a chauvinist whose instrument control would be prolonged abuse sustained by the anger and resentment against a mother-in-law – the repository of native custom – for insisting on a costly marriage; the union a battle of wills, with the matron winning the first round, and her son-in-law the final, his wife reduced and offered to him as a chattel – the nymphet hawker announced, "Kola nuts for sale" (*The Blaming Soul*, 2005c:65).

According to Witte (1983/89:172, 176), such a sentence demonstrates embedding and deletion to say more in fewer words. The sentence above, which activates a competence in writing (Winterowd, 1983/89:45), signals criticism against female-child abuse of mothers forcing their daughters to hawk snacks under the guise of raising money to carry out the religious practice of marriage. It is a thankless to task to the groom, who is inveigled into spending money he will rather spend to run his household and encouraged to treat his wife he sees fit.

Other than criticism, the long sentence is often used to broach profound issues, such as Audi Adam's philosophy of life:

> She remembers being told of his philosophy of life, which has a religious basis and which is that of the deliberate attraction of popular blame instigated by his acting in one way or the other, such that in the end people wash their hands of him for becoming no longer interesting to them and let him alone to do things as he wishes – without he getting worried about not getting popular approval and so insisting to behave any way they want, even though it may turn out to be unlawful, illegal and admissible in the Eye of the Divine. She can still remember what he said, but she still can't make heads or tails of it (*Life Afresh*, 2013:264-265).

The sentence is lengthened by a succession of constituents, such as independent, relative, adjectival and adverbial clauses – all linked up by cohesive markers.

The long sentence can also be picturesque, especially in the descriptive passage:

> The land, in all its vastness, here lightly-wooded, over there thickly-endowed, never looking, at the continuation of the environmentalist's scientific exploration, bare but also never affording him a clear view, into the middle distance, between the ground level to the lower limits (about eight feet) of the crowns of trees – the land was becoming drier by the day even as some

> trees, *Mangifera indica* (the mango) in especial, was coming into bud, and *Tamarindus indica* (the tsamiya) was continuing to ripen in time for the fasting month of Ramadhan when the faithful would use the pods of the latter tree, which has its own sweetener, to garnish their sunset, break-fasting gruel, a light porridge both refreshingly-sweet and highly-nutritious for providing the consumer with the bodily requirements of Vitamin C – an essential provender for those observing the fast some of whom would have to make do with this affordable source of vitamins alone for lacking the wherewithal to purchase expensive fare in the name of apples and oranges, pawpaws and pineapples, bananas and marsh-mallows (*Fire in My Backyard*, 2004:132-133).

The sentence, which reads and evokes the scene of a documentary screen of woody savannah, is embedded with trailing constituents (Leech and Short, 1981) in form of prepositional, nominal and dependent clauses. Such lengthy sentences perform a further function of the paragraph, challenging the reader to use his or her ingenuity to make sense of the grammar and also be creative like the writer, as Leech and Short said they should.

*The Short Sentence*

On the other hand, short sentences also build a paragraph:

> SK, as the eloquent among the Hausa people say, had given her a taste of honey. He had made her realize her dream of acting. She had acted and been appreciated in her first film. It was autobiographical; she had acted herself as herself. Then the music video was released. It got her a much bigger audience – only that people had another think and turned against her. Or was it SK? He planned and carried out everything. She had danced under hypnosis. She still couldn't remember how it all happened. It just happened. The audience must have understood. She herself did shortly after she became fully conscious that she had let herself be used by SK (*Hausa Girl*, 2010:240).

Short and brief staccato sentences serve as a form of the Jamesian style of delayed clarification in which the writer heightens the reader's interest and curiosity before revealing the meaning in the last sentence of the paragraph. The writer as well casts the paragraph in reported speech as a demonstration of his detachment and neutrality from the issue at hand.

Other than that, the writer can be derisory:

> By eight o'clock, all the women had arrived. There was much fanfare in the form of ululations produced by old women to herald the arrival of important guests, who paid the ululants for the accompanying name-dropping and praise singing. There was a lengthy exchange of greetings; of much recrimination, for not sending invitations for a recent wedding or naming ceremony, and the usual apology; of inquiries about the delayed payment of *dashi* money raised after monthly contributions and of profuse denials that it hadn't been paid to someone else, but that some other contributor caused the delay by failing to remit her share at the stipulated time; of inquiries about absentee celebrants whose failure to make an appearance was linked either to a death or a severe illness – with all the babble punctuated by baby cries. The infants were put to the breast and the chatter continued – until someone said, "Where is Jinjin?" (*The Blaming Soul*, 2005c.:187-188).

Derision is here signalled by a single word – "babble" to undervalue female conversation as idle chatter. The lengthy paragraph hints at mild criticism or sarcasm directed at women and set off by "greetings", "denials" and "inquiries" – all compared to infant cries. A powerful effect is achieved by the long sentence followed by the short one.

*The Extended Metaphor*

A powerful effect is also achieved by the use of the extended metaphor:

> During that time of incessant rain, the mud plaster, as of the carapace of a dragonfly, had slowly begun to come away, revealing mud-bricks as of the body outline of that insect. But unlike the fly, whose release from the encumbering shell invests it with the energy to fly away triumphant, rejuvenated and free, the house had only its nakedness, its sharply protuberant ribcage, its poverty of aspect to strike the young man as another reminder of Mother's complaint that he was yet to make it in life (*A Possible World*, 2008:26-27).

This is a house falling apart after sustaining the effects of drenching rain, which erodes its mud covering and leaves it bare. Unlike the fly it is likened to that is freed of its covering, the house is weakened and may not survive the next deluge of rain. Its poverty of aspect hints at the young man's poverty of pocket. Such a description compares with that of a character:

> They find a man dressed in faded clothes standing in the outer entryway with a face looking hardened and seamed with want who wouldn't fail to strike the onlooker to have the impression that the times are indeed hard and that one has to keep trying, even desperately, to stay afloat and not sink below the waters of despondency (*Life Afresh*, 2013:79).

Lallan's description is a picture that contains related images strung into a long sentence for greater effect in a style of instant picture mode that gives the reader a one-fall-swoop glimpse of a face hardened by the hard times and the supreme efforts to stay afloat.

Cooperative Narration

Narration can be shared between the omniscient narrator and the major characters in the Islamic Novel:

> As a signal of the deeply amatory nature of their relationship, Audi puts Dijegala under watch until nightfall, availing himself of the boon in the adage, Charity begins at home and drawing on that saying, Experience is the best teacher. He observes her without being found out as she collects Quraishy's laundry and folds the items of clothing, which she can't press because of the wildcat outages of power. She holds the baby tied to her back as she goes about doing the chores and shows no resentment of Audi not giving her a helping hand. He appears engrossed in that fat novel he has been reading for some time and does so to the accompaniment of a strange sounding music heard with no songs that Dijengala remembers he once claimed to have read in a newsmagazine that Western mothers play to their infant children to hear and become geniuses. Although he always turns the volume low, she wonders whether he can read and listen to music at the same time. Don't the Hausa people say that two *taura* fruits can't be chewed at once (*Life Afresh*, 2013:118-119)?

In the first two sentences, the narrator tells of Audi watching Dijengala doing the daily chores in such a way that the reader gets the impression that Audi is in control of the portrayal, but the name *Audi* in the third sentence suggests the narrator taking over. In the fourth, Dijengala is in control as signalled by the pronoun *that* about a novel she knows her husband has been reading. Indeed, there is only one narrator, but by giving the reader three perspectives there is the suggestion that the two others contribute in the storytelling.

Arguably, another thing that a writer can achieve by that style of narration is tandem thinking. Both husband and wife think the same thought at the same time and along the same lines by taking turns.

The Flash Forward

The Islamic novelist can present the views of a character in a way different from the conventional:

> Reviewing some of the preparations, as he sat outside the untidy labour room, to celebrate the birth of his first child, he had had a dead tree felled and cut up at the farm and the wood kept aside for Juma to use at her father's house (where, on Nene's wish, she would move after the delivery) for a forty-day medicinal-bath regimen, twice daily, until she was drained of all parturient blood. A meaty, peppery diet would ensure a constant milk flow for a baby which, on the seventh day, would have its velum cut and its head shaved by a local barber after which the Imam would give it a name, say more supplications, in addition to those (the *Kalimat*, or Articles of Faith) he would have intoned into the infant's ears on the third day to initiate it into the Islamic fold. The man of religion would before taking his leave with a share of the meat slaughter the animal to be provided by Jumare, while the wet-nurse would at the beginning of her duties gladly receive the head and the feet. Juma would consume the greater share of the meat. She would receive two cotton *atamfa* prints from her husband. She would wear the expensive one on naming day, when invited female guests would spend the whole day congratulating her about the great event and hand over the cheaper cloth to the wet-nurse to use to carry the baby on her back. And at the end of the cultural impedimenta of childbirth, Juma would present her with a new piece of cloth and dismiss her.
>
> The cultural trappings of childbirth Jumare marvelled at it all. Of the religious, even the role of the Imam was dispensable: Jumare could name the child himself, utter the initiation prayer and slaughter the ram. (*The Blaming Soul*, 2005b:56-57).

Here is a narrative style showing Jumare's criticism of Juma's observation of dispensable cultural antics. He has no patience to describe women celebrating childbirth and reports it instead in a flash forward as if it has already happened, even though it hasn't. But the use of the future instead of the past suggests that he considers all the trappings of childbirth celebration as diversionary. A powerful effect is achieved with a short paragraph

following a longer one, with the former being dismissed by the latter on account of the religious role of the Imam, which is transferable.

Dialogue

Islam is scholarly for which reason dialogue in the Islamic Novel is scholarly, too:

> "I always tell you that the female is entirely genital, as the hadith says, divided into body parts. Angels visit houses everyday to solicit the blessings of the Divine for the members. If the angels happen to see an ungainly dressed female, they just go away – and the family loses out. Another hadith says that even old women should dress decently around the house – and not sit around with nothing but their wrappers tied around their waists. Once the ear has heard, the body is saved" (*No Sweat*, 2013:27).

The Imam's dialogue is filled with quotations needing no inverted commas, as the learned man is used to citing religious truths in his conversation. He makes his argument profound with quotations rendered in reported speech and makes his words more realistic with Hausa proverbs. Even in ordinary conversations, characters cite quotations in the same way proverbs are often cited to drive a point home:

> "I remember the Imam, who isn't trying to discourage young men from marrying older women, saying that virgins are the most fecund of women-"
>
> "-and that," his spouse, recalling her lectures on the prophetic sayings which the said Imam often quoted to justify his own statements, "they are the ones most likely to be satisfied with the little that their husbands give them."
>
> "You indeed know the *hadith*" (*The Blaming Soul*, 2005b:171).

Such quotation or commonly cited reference is made even when friends joke among themselves:

> "What is wrong with *santi*?" Bala continues, taking a drink. "Mealtimes after all are times of joy and conviviality," he adds after a mild belch.
>
> "I agree with you," says Audi. "I heard of a hadith that encourages conversations during meals, as keeping quiet is Jewish, which we are not supposed to be."
>
> "I didn't know I had religious backing, Audi!" says his friend cheerfully, "not to keep quiet!" "What is wrong with *santi*?" Bala

continues, taking a drink. "Mealtimes after all are times of joy and conviviality," he adds after a mild belch.

"I agree with you," says Audi. "I heard of a hadith that encourages conversations during meals, as keeping quiet is Jewish, which we are not supposed to be."

"I didn't know I had religious backing, Audi!" says his friend cheerfully, "not to keep quiet!" (*Life Afresh*, 2013:79)

Audi and his friend, Bala, joke about talking off the cuff to show that the meal is very delicious. Because Islam is a leveller, even illiterate Lallan makes such reference when talking to his wife:

"Our most immediate problem is over, *malam*," says the house wife, meaning husband. "Consider our meal for the night. We have run out of cornflour. I only sent Uwani to the neighbour's to relieve myself of her endless questions about why I shouldn't sell some of the stuff we bought for her marriage. The little cornflour I have can only produce enough *fate-fate* porridge for the three of us, but not *tuwo* pudding, which will be more filling."

Lallan dips his hand into his pocket.

"She wouldn't understand for someone so young. I have some change. Give me a dish so that I can quickly go and buy some *tuwo* for us before she comes back."

"And if she asks me about it?" asks Atine, handing Lallan the dish.

"Tell her we got it from the neighbour's. Which, you say? Any but the ones you sent her to. After all, the Prophet (pbuh) said that neighbours stretch for forty houses in all the four directions" (*Life Afresh*, 2013:92).

The Proverb

As a figure of speech, the proverb (or wise saying) is used by the characters in the Islamic Novel in much the way they commonly eat kola-nuts during conversations to achieve focus, topic maintenance and greater interestedness. Hausa proverbs, in general, are highly literary, and can be classified into three: comprehensibility, creativity and legitimacy.

*Comprehensibility*

A review of the eleven novels read for this paper suggests that the proverbs that fall under this category outnumber the others. Not only are they comprehensible, they make more comprehensible still the issue that attracts the characters to deploy them in their conversations. Talking with his

friend, Ka□o, Fillo says, "You restrain others by restraining yourself" (*Hausaland*, 2003:248) to argue that not talking to other girls should encourage Takitse not to talk to men as well, but stick to him. It occurs to Hajjo Gano that "borrowed clothes do not cover your thighs" (*Hausa Girl*, 2010:24) to show the unsuitability of girls dressed as boys and boys as girls, as they demonstrate in the *gauta* game. Even as a child, she has begun to understand human psychology by hearkening the proverbs dropped by her elders in their conversations, such as "The wily bird is caught when it comes down to feed" (p. 38). When she begins to receive suitors, it strikes her that "It may turn out to be strenuous for a female cripple to marry far away from home" to voice her fears about how difficult it will be to ask a boy not to turn up again, as her strict guardian will have her do. On being asked by Fatahiyya on what has transpired between Hajjo and Kabiru Badayi, it dawns on the former that "Whoever takes the tip of the leper must give him a shave" (p.66) because the query is made along with the offer of food as inducement. Later, as the two women discuss proverbs, one tests the other to explain "The young burn up even before they come to the boil" (p. 70) or behaving out of turn because of youthful exuberance. Hajjo attracts from her stepmother "A tree is bent while it is still a sapling" (p. 79) when the girl behaves out of turn. She is counselled by her sister that, as someone younger, Hajjo should defer to those older than her, learn to behave from them, because "One knows the depth of a river by watching those who waded in first" (p.109).

*Creativity*

These types of proverbs are the most highly literary, making comparisons metaphorically. In *No Sweat* (2013:111), Talle approaches Faruqu Ladan for a loan to buy a motorcycle and the latter tries to dissuade his friend by saying, "You're looking at a piece of peeled cassava a you would a blob of fat" to argue that he is not affluent, adding that he doesn't possess the money Talle assumes he has. Later in the story, Alu Kwara contradicts Faruqu, saying that, "Falsehood spawns flower, but never fruits" to press the argument that the young man has indeed collected some money from the retired police officer under false pretences – and even displayed a CD recording of the deal.

Discussing his mother-in-law's breaking of a promise in *The Blaming Soul* (2005b:60), Jumare tells Juma that "The moth often cuts the neck" to express his displeasure and disapproval of the failure to have his son returned to him after the infant was weaned off his mother's milk. Juma interprets doing that as tantamount to a lie. A similar comparison involving two things can be seen in the saying, "If the vulture can suffice for me, let

the egret fly away with its white feathers" uttered by Mujahid Yusuf in *A Possible World* to chide his sister to reduce waste by using locust-bean *daddawa* cakes instead of the more expensive Maggi condiment cubes, as that may delay him from buying the trousseau for his marriage. Again, a dual comparison is made later in the novel with "If it has the cure, let the hyena treat itself of diarrhoea" (p. 256). Hani cites the proverb concerning changing her dress code before prevailing on her boyfriend to change his ways, so that they can wed. Ummi advises her to affect more decent attire.

*Legitimacy*

Much more than citing a proverb, the characters of the Islamic Novel go further and give the device greater legitimacy by manipulating it in such a way that by way of decomposition they break it up and utter it mostly in their own words. Friends converse cheerfully in *Women Without Borders* (2010:73) and one teases the other by saying, "Perhaps he is saying you are hiding behind a *guzuma* cow to take a shot at a *karsana* heifer to chaff him for hiding information and to deflect attention from the speaker to the other fellow. Elsewhere in the novel, Alti Kawu queries his wife's calling their daughter back home after the latter has a slight misunderstanding with her husband, "A tree sinks its roots in your house, but throws its shade elsewhere (p. 80)." He tries to show her that the marital, rather than the parental, home is a woman's permanent abode. Maje Auta, the husband concerned, keeps his secret passion for Jinjin Abuja from his wife, saying, "A Hausa proverb has it that, although he who asks for advice doesn't botch things up, he has no secrets to keep" (p. 124). He fears that she will pass the news around and so give him away. The generalization doesn't fool the intelligent reader, who easily understands a superb attempt at deflection.

Some of the characters show grater expertise by directly involving themselves in the proverb. "I didn't kill the rabbit," says Liti (*Life Afresh*, 2013:183), "I was just asked to sling it and bear it homewards" at a departmental meeting in which he denies starting a controversial argument but giving a mischievous interpretation about ageing between women and men. Other than being verbal, involvement can also be psychological: "Manners are a stone engraftation" (*A Possible World*, 2008:55). Ummi's childhood upbringing instils in her beautiful manners, especially religious devotion and human relations. Still, she alone finally determines her character and personality. As said in a related proverb, "You sire a child but do not determine his or her disposition." Concerning human relations, "Amity resides in the feet" (p. 73). That refers to Ummi's preference to pay visits to friend, Hani, which is more pleasant and cheaper, than phone her,

which is distant and costlier. On visits, they talk at greater length than on phone.

Another way in which a writer shows greater legitimacy to the issue at hand is when he or she uses the proverb as part of the narrative:

> He had, Haji Yunus, as his duty to the individual, to tell his neighbour the truth however bitter the flash of cognition would be to Sadisu, however bitterly angry it would make the latter feel. He knew that his next-door neighbour was being friendly, neighbourly and charitable about it all, yet there was the idea that Binta's father's land *damo* monitor should keep away from Sadisu's *harawa* fodder as to which threat their friendly relations, their neighbourly relations and the charity on which the amicability of those relations was founded prevented the pronouncement of. But then knowledge of (and belief in) it did not embolden the Patron to resort to put the other fellow to inconvenience – such inconvenience as that hasty retreat that could amount to a show of a weak intellect or a weakness of resolve on Sadisu's part. His knowledge of the pride of the average Nigerian led the landowner to believe that Sadisu would vehemently oppose any insinuations as to his being shallow minded. That would give the impression of puerility and lead to a war of words between them (*Portrait of a Patron*, 2006a:49).

Haji Idris wants to counsel his neighbour to change his ways but he feels that Sadisu may not take it lightly and may even prefer that Idris desist from it. The writer here competes with the character by using reported speech to make more emphatic the imagery in the saying. Later in the novel, the writer seizes the opportunity once more to deploy the proverb as part of the narrative through Zinatu concerning Qawarira:

> It was foolish of Qawarira, as Zinatu, making recourse to a proverb, explained, to appropriate the saddle and push her former husband who owned the horse back to the hindquarters. What "right thinking" husband would condescend to accept a position of subordination? Only a simpleton – that mouthpiece of the female who wouldn't mind the derisive title, The Wife-says – would accept the position of mediocrity, of parochialism and of pusillanimity. Qawarira must not only determine the quality of the broth but what the meal itself should be. The latter is the preserve of the Hausa husband; the delicacy of the soup is dependent on the ingredients for which he is solely responsible (*Portrait of a Patron*, 2006a:49).

Considering Qawarira's handling of marital relations, Zinatu criticises the young woman's insubordination, which is tantamount to a change of places that her husband's disapproval of led to the termination of her marriage.

Synonymy can be shown where the proverb is cited verbatim later in the novel:

> In appreciation of the happiness that he felt on receiving the news of the interest that Hannafi showed in Qawarira, the Patron thought of the proverb, *A sudden fall has turned into a sitting position.* And thinking in the same vein, Zinatu came up with her own version, *The swipe of an axe has fallen on a joint* (*Portrait of a Patron*, 2006a:49).

Qawarira's uncle's expectation becomes a reality when a suitor proposes marriage to her. Coincidence is also shown in both Haji Yunus' and Zinatu's thinking about the same thing expressed in synonymous proverbs.

## Conclusion

By its nature, the English Novel is atheistic. That notwithstanding, it has a great deal to offer to the Islamic Novel in the form of thematic treatment in the effort to enlighten and entertain the reader. By being multidisciplinary, the Islamic Novel dwells on major aspects of the Muslim Life, ranging from history to science and politics to give an impression of the Muslim expression of impeccable manners. Their lifestyle is communal; individualism arises when characters choose to pay lip service to the religion in favour of egocentricity. As a complete way of life, religion features in people's daily preoccupations, with both the literate and the barely literate quoting religious truths to give their points greater cogency and seriousness than when they only cite proverbs, which often accompany the scholarly declamations. Being communal and using revealed truths and wise sayings arguably means that the Islamic Novel is written with the reader in mind, since that style of writing is meant to carry him or her along towards the path of comprehensibility, but at the same time calling on them to contribute to the making of meaning (Raimes, 1983/89) by applying their skill of decomposition, or making sense of the literary expressions presented in the Islamic Novel that, along with content, demonstrate the juxtaposition of style and structure on which the Islamic Novel is founded. Yet as a new genre of literary fiction, more research should be conducted to contribute to this emerging trend in literary discourse.

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