

ARABIC AND ENGLISH MODERNISMS: A COMPARATIVE STUDY OF AL-SAYYAB, ABD AL-SABUR AND T. S. ELIOT

**A Thesis Submitted During 2010 to the University of Hyderabad
In Partial Fulfillment of the Award of a Ph.D. Degree in Comparative Literature**

**By
Mohammed Abdullah Abduldaem Hizabr**



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CERTIFICATE

This is to certify that the thesis entitled “*Arabic and English Modernisms: A Comparative Study of Al-Sayyab, Abd al-Sabur and T. S. Eliot*” submitted by **Mr. Mohammed Abdullah Abduldaem Hizabr** bearing Reg. No. 04HCPH02 in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the award of Doctor of Philosophy in Comparative Literature is a bonafide work carried out by him under my supervision and guidance.

The thesis has not been submitted previously in part or in full to this or any other University or Institution for the award of any degree or diploma.

Signature of the Supervisor

Head of the Department

Dean of the School

DECLARATION

I, **Mohammed Abdullah Abduldaem Hizabr**, hereby declare that this thesis entitled “*Arabic and English Modernisms: A Comparative Study of Al-Sayyab, Abd al-Sabur and T. S. Eliot*” submitted by me under the guidance and supervision of Dr. M. T. Ansari, is a bonafide research work. I also declare that it has not been submitted previously in part or in full to this University or any other University or Institution for the award of any degree or diploma.

Date:

Name: Mohammed Abdullah A. Hizabr

Signature of the Student

Reg. No. 04HCPH02

*To
My Mother & Father*

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Mohammed Abdullah Abduldaem Hizabr

ABSTRACT

This comparative study is an attempt to explore the relationship between Arabic modernism [*Al-Hadathah*] and English modernism on the basis of acculturation and hybridity. Unlike the existing scholarship, this study addresses the subject from an Arab perspective. I argue that Arabic poetic modernism [*Al-Hadathah*] is just not an offspring of the Western modernisms, but that its roots can be traced back to the 8th and 9th centuries. Nevertheless, such an argument does not negate a relationship between Arabic and English modernisms of the 20th century, as the discussions throughout this study shows.

This study aims at highlighting the significant position of Arabic literature among world literature and aims at highlighting the relationship between Arabic and English modernist literatures. It attempts to trace the sources of Arabic modernism in order to affirm the Arab cultural identity. In this sense, it rejects the Eurocentric hegemony that tries to associate 'modernism' with the process of westernization. The study also examines the extent of hybridity and acculturation between the Arab world and the West.

English modernist poetry had revolted against the traditional flowery poetic diction of Victorian and Romantic poetry as well as against the notion of nature and imagination. From the Arab perspective, a modernist poem is a vision that displays the ability of the poet to transcend the knowable world.

This study is divided into five chapters. Following a general introduction, the first chapter deals with the socio-political and literary background of Arab modernist poets in order to situate the selected poets, Badr Shakir al-Sayyab and Salah Abd al-Sabur. The second chapter focuses on the common themes and techniques of Arabic and English

modernisms. Chapter three is a comparative analysis of Al-Sayyab and Abd al-Sabur. The fourth chapter explores the similarities and differences between Arabic and English modernisms. The conclusion sums up the general idea of the study, demonstrates the findings, and suggests topics for further research.

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INTRODUCTION

This thesis is a comparative study of Arabic and English modernisms through comparison of Badr Shakir Al-Sayyab and Salah Abd al-Sabur as pioneers of Arabic poetic modernism with T. S. Eliot as a pioneer of English modernism. The seeds of comparative studies in the Arab world can be traced back to the 8th century when Ibn Al-Muqaffa wrote his collection of tales *Kalila wa Dimna*. Ibn Al-Muqaffa translated his collection *Kalila wa Dimna* from Pahlavi into Arabic.¹ Abu Al-Qasim Al-Hasan Ibn Bishr Al-Amidi (d. 987) wrote a book entitled *Al-Muwazana Bayn Shir Abi Tammam wa Al-Buhturi* [Comparison Between the Poetry of Abu Tammam and Al-Buhturi] in which he compared these two Arab poets, Abu Tammam² and Al-Buhturi.³ As ‘Comparative Literature’ in the strict sense means “The examination and analysis of the relationships and similarities of the literatures of different peoples and nations”⁴ the comparison between Abu Tammam and Al-Buhturi cannot be regarded as a comparative study because both poets are Arabs and have the same language and culture. However, such attempts indicate that Arabs were aware of comparative literature since the medieval ages.

It was in the second half of the 20th century that comparative literature became significant in the Arab academia. The subject of ‘modernism’ became a preferred topic for many Arab writers and critics. Some Arab critics argue that Arabic modernism is the upshot of the Western modernism. They argue that Arab modernist poets are influenced

¹Josef W. Meri, ed, *Medieval Islamic Civilization: an Encyclopedia*, vol. 1 (New York: Routledge, 2006) 346.

²Habib ibn Aws Al-Tai (788-845) was known as Abu Tammam. He was an Arab poet in the Abbasid era.

³Al-Walid ibn Ubayd Allah Al-Buhturi (820 - 897) was an Arab poet in the Abbasid era.

⁴J. A. Cuddon, *The Penguin Dictionary of Literary Terms and Literary Theory* (London: Penguin, 1977) 164.

by the Western modernist poets. Muhsin J. Al-Musawi says “The dialogue with other cultures, especially with Lorca, Neruda, T. S. Eliot, Pound, and Baudelaire, among others, helped poets, nationalists, and outcasts to create substitutive textual homelands.”⁵ But such arguments are amply contradicted by many other Arab critics who claim that Arabic modernism began in the Abbasid period by poets who violated the norm of ‘traditional’ poetry.

My own argument is that though there are similarities between Arabic and Western modernisms, Arabic modernism draws on Arabic cultural heritage and has a right of place of its own. The similarity between Arabic and Western modernisms is due to factors of acculturation and hybridity between Arabs and the Westerners. Acculturation and hybridity between Arabic and Western cultures resulted from several socio-political events. The French and British colonization of the Arab world as well as the establishment of American Universities in Beirut in 1866 and in Cairo in 1919 have played a significant role in spreading Western culture in the Arab world. Many writers graduated from these universities, like the Syrian poet Yusuf Al-Khal (1917-1987), who studied philosophy and English literature at the American University in Beirut. *Mahjaris* [Emigrants] poets, who emigrated from Syria, Lebanon, and Palestine and settled in US and Latin America, have played a big role in the cultural hybridity between Arabic and Western poetry. For instance, Arab emigrants in US established *Arrabita Al-Qalamiya* [The Pen Bond] in 1920 in New York, and in Latin America, Arab emigrants established *Al-Usba Al- Andalusia* [The Andalusian Group] in 1933 in Sao Paulo, Brazil. Arab emigrant poets focused on issues of identity, and cultural heritage and strove to integrate

⁵Muhsin J. Al-Musawi, *Arabic Poetry Trajectories of Modernity and Tradition* (London: Routledge, 2006) 15.

themselves into other nations in order to hybridize and enrich their Arabic culture. The emigrant poets introduced a new diction, new metaphors, and new rhythms in their poems. Translation movement that started from 1834 until 1914 by some Arab scholars such as Rifa'ah Al-Tahtawi, was also among the reasons which facilitated the process of acculturation between Arabs and the Westerners. M. M. Badawi, in his book *A Short History of Modern Arabic Literature* says “in 1958, Yusuf Al-Khal published an anthology of Arabic translations of works by Whitman, Emily Dickenson, H. D. Wallace Steven, E. E. Cummings, William Carlos Williams, Auden, and Robert Lowell among others, and he also translated jointly with Adonis, Eliot’s *The Waste Land*.”⁶ According to Badawi, Al- Sayyab translated Ezra Pound, Stephen Spender, and C. Day Lewis into Arabic, and also he translated Lorca and Rimbaud⁷ (through English) into Arabic. Interest in Western literatures, especially French and English, grew among Arab poets such as Adonis and Al-Sayyab.

For Arabs, the 20th century was the era of changes. The idea of change included politics, literature, and ideology. In literature, the revolt against the traditional poetry coincided with the revolutions against colonization and totalitarian regimes in the Arab world. In *A Critical Introduction to Modern Arabic Poetry*, M. M. Badawi points out that ‘modern’ Arabic poetry is characterized by a spirit of revolt.⁸ Though Arab modernist poets have varied perspectives towards political and ideological issues, they agreed that poetry should be modernist and not be subjected to the traditional poetics. In her essay “Contemporary Arabic Poetry: Vision and Attitudes”, Salma Khadra Jayyusi explains:

⁶M. M. Badawi, *A Short History of Modern Arabic Literature* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1993) 82.

⁷Ibid, 63.

⁸M. M. Badawi, *A Critical Introduction to Modern Arabic Poetry* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1975) 261.

“The new poets were not homogenous in their outlook on the world. Some were Marxists, some were Arab or Syrian nationalists, some were liberals, but they all agreed on one thing: that poetry had to abandon the self-contained aesthetic world of a previous generation and look for broader horizons.”⁹

I have selected this topic for study because of its newness in terms of comparing Arabic and English modernisms. This comparative study presents a new perspective on discussing the relationship between Arabic and English modernist poetry. Arabic studies in the field of comparative literature had focused on the issue of “influence” rather than intertextuality and acculturation between the two literatures, Arabic and English. Similarly, the works available in English on the topic either apply Western theories on Arabic literature or study the topic from a Western perspective. Moreover, this study is an attempt to rectify the prevailing misconception about Arabic modernism [*Al-Hadathah*] as this term was always understood to be vague and ambiguous, and many studies refer to modernism as an intellectual and philosophical trend that advocates atheism and the loss of cultural identity.

This study endeavours and asserts the significant position of Arabic literature among world literatures, and its relationship with English literature. The study also explores the extent of hybridity and acculturation between the Arab world and the West. It attempts to trace the sources of Arabic modernism in order to affirm Arab cultural identity. In this sense, this study rejects the Eurocentric hegemony that tries to associate modernism with the process of Westernization. During the colonial rule, Arabic poetry became an ‘unsung’ genre compared to the Western poetry due to the Western policy,

⁹Salma Khadra Jayyusi, “Contemporary Arabic Poetry: Vision and Attitudes”, ed. R. C. Ostle, *Studies in Modern Arabic Literature* (London: Aris and Phillips, 1975) 49.

which promoted “cultural antipathy” and a negative stereotyping of Arabs.

The current study selects two Arab modernist poets, Al-Sayyab and Abd al-Sabur, because they represent the first generation of Arabic modernism. They are the most prominent poets among the pioneers of Arabic modernism. I compare these two Arab poets with T. S. Eliot being the master of English modernism. Moreover, the similarities between the modernism of Eliot and that of Al-Sayyab and Abd al-Sabur are the prime reason for this comparative analysis.

My study of modernism is limited to poetry because Arabic poetry has a deep-rooted history since the pre-Islamic era to the present. Arabic poetry has always been a glorified genre in Arabic literature. It holds a greater significance than any other literary genre as it reflects the historical, social, political, philosophical and literary developments and achievements of the Arabs. Moreover, Arabic poetry is the only genre where in modernism flourished

This study is divided into five chapters. Chapter one is titled “Bard Shakir Al-Sayyab and Salah Abd al-Sabur: Socio-Political and Literary Background”. This chapter deals with socio-political and literary background of Arab modernist poets to situate the study and discuss the two selected poets, Al-Sayyab and Abd al-Sabur. This chapter will argue that Al-Sayyab and Abd al-Sabur are the real pioneers and practitioners of Arabic modernism. It informs about the poets and briefly comments on the socio-political contexts of the Arab world, particularly Iraq and Egypt. This chapter will strive to show why these two poets deserve the distinction of pioneers in Arabic modernism by considering and discussing other poets who may also make such a claim.

Chapter two is titled “Modernist Poetics: Themes and Techniques”. This chapter

explores the concept of Western and Arabic modernisms from both Western and Arabic perspectives. This chapter focuses on the prevailing themes of Arabic and English modernist poetry, such as ‘alienation’, ‘city’ and ‘death’, and explores the attitudes of the modernist poets towards each one. The situation in the Arab world in the 20th century made the Arab modernist poets feel downgraded and lost, suffering physical and spiritual alienation. The loss of Palestine and a sense of loss of freedom were among the reasons for the sombre mood and alienation of Arab modernist poets. Modernist poetry, for example, portrayed the city negatively as a centre of coercive government establishment with its brutal police force and its hordes of informers. The modernist poets have dealt with the theme of city in their poems intensively. For them the city was the home of thousands of social outcasts who live in sordid conditions. They identified the modern man as a victim of modern civilization. The second chapter also deals with the techniques of Arabic and English poetic modernisms, such as employing everyday language, irony, unconventional metaphor, exotic imagery, allusions and myths. It shows that the renewal of these poetic devices and the renewal of themes are the landmarks of Arabic modernist poetry. It reveals that the modernist poets drew on the subjects and the themes that express their philosophic mood, thoughts, and their perceptions of the universe and human life. This chapter shows that the eight Arabic traditional themes¹⁰ that were dealt with for several centuries were widely ignored in favour of the modernist themes that express contemporary life.

Chapter three is titled “Comparative Analysis of Badr Shakir Al-Sayyab and Salah Abd al-Sabur.” This chapter deals with the similarities and differences between the

¹⁰*Madih* [Panegyric], *Hija* [Lampoon or Satire], *Ritha* [Elegy], *Wasf* [Descriptive poetry], *Ghazal* [Love poetry], *Khamriyyat* [Wine poetry], Hunt poetry [Tardiyyat], and *Zuhdiyat* [Homiletic poetry].

two Arab modernist poets, Al-Sayyab and Abd al-Sabur, in term of themes, techniques and poetic vision. It explores a complex world fraught with paradoxes that Arab modernist poets encountered. For Arab modernist poets, the term of “The Waste Land” replaced ‘Utopia’, mystic vision replaced the romantic vision, and pessimism replaced optimism. In such a situation, Arabic modernist poetry moved from insularity to universality. Salma Jayyusi in her book *Trends and Movements in Modern Arabic Poetry* asserts that:

Modern poetic revolution does not consist merely in reflecting the age, nor in rejecting what is traditional and old, for neither the change in the theme and ideas, nor in form, are enough to bring about modernism in poetry. The main difference of the new poetry from the old lies firstly in its having a vertical outlook on the age, understanding it with insight, vision and foreknowledge; and secondly in the ability of expressing them in a unique, purely personal tone. (598)

This chapter moves on to discuss the subject of impersonality in Al-Sayyab’s and Abd al-Sabur’s poems. It also attempts to examine their attitude towards their cultural heritage.

Chapter four is titled “Arabic Modernism in Perspective: Points of Convergence and Departure”. This chapter presents Arabic and English modernism as different in their socio-political and literary contexts. It attempts to periodize Arabic and English literary modernisms and their relationship to the tradition. This chapter also examines the common grounds of comparisons between Arabic and English modernisms. It explores the similarities and differences between Arabic modernism represented by Al-Sayyab and Abd al-Sabur and English modernism represented by T. S. Eliot. This chapter shows that

Al-Sayyab and Abd al-Sabur and T. S. Eliot share certain themes and techniques in the tradition not they practiced. The feeling of alienation and a negative attitude towards the city are common trait in their poetry. They voice together in their stance against the city and modernity. They play with words to produce a fragmented text. They use the everyday language, but they produce vague and difficult texts due to their use of unconventional metaphor, allusions, foreign words and exotic imageries. Nevertheless, there are differences between them in terms of their view on history. Eliot implicates history as the property of Europe. Al-Sayyab and Abd al-Sabur, on the other hand, attempt to integrate Arabic tradition with Western tradition to bring a new hybrid poetics. Arab modernist poets usually hybridize their poetry by utilizing Christian symbols, Western myths and historical figures. This chapter concentrates built on the descriptive and analytical techniques. It attempts to explore the relationship between Arabic modernism [*Al-Hadathah*] and English modernism on the basis of acculturation and hybridity.

Al-Sayyab and Abd al-Sabur composed their poems in Arabic language, therefore I present my own translation in this study as well as translations by other writers. I have drawn an available translation from Arabic into English of Al-Sayyab's and Abd al-Sabur's poetry by Issa Boullata, Abdullah Al-Udhari, Mounah Khouri and Lena Jayyusi and Christopher Middleton. I have supplemented them by translating required lines myself. I have tried to give translation of all the Arabic titles and phrases within the thesis.

CHAPTER ONE

BADR SHAKIR AL-SAYYAB AND SALAH ABD AL-SABUR: PIONEERS OF ARABIC MODERNISM

1.1. Socio-Political Background

In his book *Muqaddimah*, Ibn Khaldun says “The vanquished always want to imitate the victor in his distinctive characteristics, his dress, his occupation, and his other conditions and customs.”¹¹ In the medieval ages specifically in the period between 749 and 1258 Arabic literature was dominant and has influenced Western literatures. According to Susan Friedman, borrowings from other cultures were the foremost reasons behind the rise of the West after 1500.¹² In her book *The Arabic Role in Medieval Literary History: A Forgotten Heritage*, Maria Rosa Menocal argues that Arabic culture played a vital role in shaping medieval literature in Europe. However, Westerners, though greatly influenced by medieval Arabic literature, are stubborn to acknowledge the role of Arabic literature. In his book *The Making of Humanity*, Robert Briffault says:

Arabian knowledge began at an early date to percolate into Christian Europe. . . . “All the young Christians who distinguish themselves by their talent, know the language and literature of the Arabs, read and study passionately the Arab books, gather at great expense great libraries of these, and everywhere proclaim with a loud voice how admirable is that literature.”¹³

¹¹Ibn Khaldun, *The Muqaddimah: An Introduction to History*, trans, Franz Rosenthal, ed, N. J. Dawood (Princeton: Princeton University, 1967) 116.

¹²Susan Stanford Friedman, “Unthinking Manifest Destiny: Muslim Modernities on Three Continents” *Shades of the Planet: American Literature as World Literature*, ed, Wai-Chee Dimock and Lawrence Buell (Princeton: Princeton University, 2007) 70.

¹³Robert Briffault, *The Making of Humanity* (London: George Allen, 1919) 198.

After the invasion of Baghdad in 1258, the domination of the Arabic culture diminished. From 1515 up to 1914, the Ottomans ruled Arab world. Imperialist countries, especially Britain and France planned to occupy the Arab world, but before doing that, they had to demolish the Ottoman *Khilafah* which represented the unity of the Arab world and Turkey. Britain and France triggered the issue of Arab and Turkish Nationalism by supporting secret political groups in Turkey such as the “Committee of Union and Progress” and the “Young Turkey” on one hand and simultaneously supporting and encouraging Arabs to revolt against the Ottoman state on the other hand. In 1916, the ruler of Mecca, Al-Sharif Hussein declared the Great Arab Revolt against Ottomans with the help of the British Empire. In the meantime, there was a secret agreement between UK and France known as Sykes-Picot agreement in 1916 which stipulated the partition of Ottoman-ruled Arab lands between them¹⁴. Britain not only betrayed the Arabs, but also made Palestine the national homeland for Jews. The Arab world was divided into twenty countries all of which were colonized by Britain, France and Italy except Saudi Arabia and north of Yemen.

In the first half of the 20th century, major events occurred in the Arab world, in the aftermath the World War I. For instance, in 1924, Ottoman *Khilafah* was abolished and Western colonization replaced it; Islamic, leftist and nationalist parties were founded to oppose the hegemony of the Western imperialism and to call for Arab unity. Moreover, some Arab countries became semi-independent, such as Egypt and Iraq; others obtained full independence, such as Lebanon and Syria. The worst event to occur in the Arab world was the tragedy of Palestine and the establishment of Israel after the defeat of the

¹⁴Arthur Goldschmidt Jr and Lawrence Davidson, *A Concise History of the Middle East*, 8th edition (Colorado: Westview, 2006) 213.

Arab armies in 1948. Other crucial events also occurred in the first half of the 20th century at the international level such as the Bolshevik Revolution in 1917, the rise of the Fascist and Nazi regimes, and World War II.

In the first two decades of the second half of the 20th century, most of the Arab states obtained independence. Moreover, the Arab regimes which connived with colonization, were overthrown. The conflict between the Western Imperialism and USSR Communism made many of the Arab intellectuals and poets incline to socialism as it resisted imperialism and colonization. In his book *A Short History of Modern Arabic Literature*, M. M. Badawi says:

Because Russia was an ally, Russian literature and the Soviet regime were given some publicity in the Arab world as part of the war propaganda effort, with the result that young Arab intellectuals, especially in Egypt, become increasingly interested in Marxist thought. . . . Poets with Marxist leanings, particularly the Iraqis Abd al-Wahhab al-Bayati and Badr Shakir Al-Sayyab, had a large following in the Arab world, especially as their names were linked with the new free verse form, even though that form was not confined to Marxist poets. (Badawi 53, 55)

The British mandate lasted in Iraq from 1914 to 1932; then the oligarchic monarchy was from 1932 up to the 1958 revolution. King Faisal I, who came to the throne with the help of Britain, ruled from 1921 up to 1933, King Ghazi from 1933 to 1939, then King Faisal II from 1939 up to 1958. The political opposition in Iraq was strong as it had three parties: the National Democratic Party, the *Baath* and the Iraqi Communist Party. The opposition, especially the Iraqi Communist Party was behind the

uprising in the 1940s and 1950s. The Iraqi Communist Party supported Abd Al-Karim Qasim, the first president of Iraq after the revolution of 1957. After the Baathist coup of 1963 against Qasim, the leaders of the Iraqi Communist Party were executed because of their alliance with Abd Al-Karim Qasim.

Like other poets and intellectuals of his generation, Al-Sayyab admired Communism and became a member of the Iraqi Communist Party. The Iraqi nationalist parties and the Communist party were in a conflict due to the Communist party's attitude towards the Palestinian issue. This matter was also among the points of dispute between Al-Sayyab and his comrades in the Communist party. Al-Sayyab was more a poet than a politician, therefore he approached Western poetry of Edith Sitwell and T. S. Eliot in spite of the conflict between Arab peoples and the Western powers, and the conflict between Communism and Imperialism. Al-Sayyab suffered a lot from the political disorder in Iraq. He criticized the miserable socio-political situation in Iraq and the Arab world through poetry. Al-Sayyab's poetry of the last phase of his life reveals how introspective, subjective and hopeless a poet he was. As Al-Sayyab lived in a period of turmoil and nationalist movements. He liberated Arabic poetry from monorhyme and the monometer that represented the conventional Arabic poem (*Qasida*). Such violation of Arabic traditional rules (metric rules and rhyme scheme) is considered a significant movement in the history of Arabic poetry. Al-Sayyab's "Rain Song" is regarded one of the most significant poems in Arabic modernist poetry composed in free verse, using a new diction with strong and rhetorical words which gave credibility to Arabic free verse movement. Al-Sayyab utilized the modernist techniques of allusions, myths, monologue, dialogue, irony, unconventional metaphor, and imagery. He also dealt with the modernist

themes of alienation, city and death. In her essay “Modernist Poetry in Arabic”¹⁵ Salma Jayyusi states that Al-Sayyab is “the first major modernist who established, through a fine poetic contribution unrivalled in the fifties, some of the basic tenets” of Arabic literary modernism.

In Egypt, the socio-political situation was similar to the case in Iraq. In 1517, Egypt came under the Ottoman rule. In 1798, France invaded Egypt and withdrew in 1801 under the pressure of the Anglo-Ottoman forces. Mohammed Ali Pasha ruled Egypt from 1805 to 1848. He was an important figure who modernized Egypt. He began the process of acculturation with the West by sending educational missions to Europe, particularly to France. Many Western textbooks were translated into Arabic and were printed by Arabic printing press for use of the students. Thus, Mohammed Ali Pasha established a bridge of communication with the West through these ‘missions’. In 1882, British troops occupied Egypt in order to control over the Suez Canal, while the Ottoman state retreated. During the World War I, Egypt served as a base for the Allied Powers.

The Egyptian resistance against the Ottomans began with a revolt by Ahmed Urabi in 1879. This revolution sowed the seeds of Egyptian national parties such as the *Wafd Party* [Delegation Party] which was formed in 1918 and led a revolution against the British in 1919. This revolution enabled Egypt to obtain its political independence in 1922. Other political parties were established aftermath the World War I, such as the Egyptian Communist Party in 1922, *Al-Ikhwan Al-Muslimun* [The Muslim Brotherhood] in 1928. Egyptians did not have entire sovereignty over Egypt because Britain maintained its control over the Suez Canal until 1952 when the ‘Free Officers’ led a revolution

¹⁵Salma Khadra Jayyusi, “Modernist Poetry in Arabic”, M. M. Badawi, ed, *Modern Arabic Literature* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1992) 156 -157.

against the Egyptian monarchy which was similar to the Iraqi monarchy. Consequently, the evacuation treaty between Egypt and UK was signed in 1954; the British troops completely evacuated Egypt by 1956. In the same year, there was a military attack on Egypt known as “Tripartite Aggression” by Britain, France and Israel. This was due to an attempt to nationalize Suez Canal that was announced by president Gamal Abd al-Nasser. Nasser’s nationalist activities and efforts to unify the Arab states made him a prominent figure in the Arab world. In 1958, Abd al-Nasser formed a federation union with Syria by the name of United Arab Republic, but this union broke up in 1962. Abd al-Nasser was chosen the president of the Non-Aligned Movement in 1964. Abd al-Nasser lost his popularity in the Arab world as a hero after his defeat in the six-day war with Israel in 1967 and the fall of *Sina’a* into Israeli hands. In Egypt, Abd al-Nasser’s popularity was less compared to other Arab countries because Egyptians were aware that Abd al-Nasser toppled Mohammed Najeeb, the first president of Egypt after the 1952 revolution to replace him without an election. His repressive administration and his cruel attitude towards those who opposed him especially leaders and members of the ‘Muslim Brotherhood’ made him the first dictator in Egypt in modern Arab history. Although Abd al-Nasser boasted about democracy and freedom of speech, he outlawed opposition parties such as the *Wafd* Party, the Communist Party and the Muslim Brotherhood. After his death in 1970, Anwar al-Sadat became the third president of Egypt. After the 1973 war between Egypt and Israel, he signed peace treaties with Israel in 1977 and 1978 known as “Camp David Accords”. In 1981, al-Sadat was assassinated during an annual victory parade in Cairo.

Abd al-Sabur was born in 1931 and lived in the political upheavals of Egypt and Arab world. He witnessed the Egyptians struggle against British colonialism and against the oligarchic regime. He also witnessed the conflicts between the nationalist parties, in Syria and Iraq on one hand and in Egypt on the other. He saw the oppression of the intellectuals in Egypt by those who advocated freedom and democracy. All these events shaped his philosophy towards life and poetry. He contributed to the modernist Arabic poetry by not only writing in a language that sprang from the heart of everyday experience, but also by his discontinuity with the past. Abd al-Sabur also followed the poetic renewal in Iraq, Syria and Lebanon. In her essay “Modernist Poetry in Arabic”, Salma Jayyusi states:

It was Salah Abd al-Sabur, Egypt’s foremost poet until his premature death in 1981, who best conquered the powerful hold of classical poetry on the subconscious of poets. He wrote in modern language, with not only a vocabulary, a syntax, intonations and rhythms that were part of the auditory consciousness of contemporary Arabs, but also with a new modernist spirit permeating the whole work where a noticeable but subtle dislocation of structures and a toning down of address are effected. . . . He wrestled with words and meanings, creating new paths and a new sensibility by raising the ordinary language.¹⁶

Al-Sayyab wanted to rehabilitate Arabic poetry and to keep pace with European literature. In his book *Modern Arabic Poetry 1800 -1970*, S. Moreh argues that Arab poets “felt the need for radical changes in Arabic metrics, rhyme schemes, themes, style

¹⁶Salma Khadra Jayyusi, “Modernist Poetry in Arabic”, M. M. Badawi, *Modern Arabic Literature*, (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1992), 160-161.

and diction.”¹⁷ However, the role of Western modernist poetry in the renewal of Arabic poetry remains an inescapable factor due to many reasons: i) Western colonization of the Arab world; ii) influence of the Arab scholars who studied in Europe and in the American University in Beirut, which was founded in 1866; iii) the impact of the Arab Christian poets who emigrated to north and South America who facilitated hybridity and acculturation.

1.2. Pioneers and Proponents of Arabic Modernism

Adonis believes that modernity is a timeless concept. Therefore, he does not confine Arabic modernism to a specific period. He attributes the pioneering of Arabic modernism to some Arab poets in the eighth century. Adonis places Bashir Ibn Burd (714-784), Abu Tammam (788-845), and Abu Nuwas (757-814) as well as the Sufi poets like Muhammad Ibn Abd al-Jabbar Al-Niffari (d. 965), and Abu Hayyan Al-Tawhidi (d. 1010) in the first category of modernist poets. For Adonis, Arabic modernism sprang up early due to the conflict between conservative and liberal poets during the Abbasid period. He argues that there were two trends of modernisms in Arab world: the first is political/intellectual and the second is artistic. The revival [*Ihya'iyyah*] in the Arab world in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries was marked as a period of Western colonization and acculturation with the West. For Adonis, a modernist poet neither criticizes Arabic religious and historical past nor denies the Western colonization, but his poetry is artistically new. Therefore, Adonis considers the Iraqi poet, Ma'ruf Al-Rasafi not as the modernist poets despite criticizing Arabic tradition and denying the Western colonization. Adonis argues that *Diwan* poets (Abbas Mahmud Al-Aqqad, Abd al-Qadir

¹⁷S. Moreh, *Modern Arabic Poetry 1800- 1970* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1976) 313.

Al-Mazini, and Abd Al-Rahman Shukri) had a pioneering role in modern Arabic poetry because they crossed the boundaries of Arabic traditional aesthetics. He regards the Syrian poet, Mutran Khalil Mutran one of the most successful poets in the first half of the twentieth century because he harmonized the traditional with the contemporary on one hand and on the other hand reconciled originality and development. Adonis points out that *Apollo* poets (Ahmed Zaki Abu Shadi, Ibrahim Naji, Ali Mahmud Taha and Abu Al-Qasim Al-Shabbi) paved the way for structural and conceptual change in Arabic poetry. Adonis labels the Lebanese poet and writer Gibran Khalil Gibran, who initiated new Arabic poetry¹⁸ as an apocalyptic writer. For the Palestinian critic and writer Salma Khadra Jayyusi, the Arabic modernist period is categorized into three phases¹⁹: the first is the phase of pioneers which was between 1948 and 1967, the second is the phase of seventies, and the third is the phase of eighties. For her, these three phases are ‘the generation of pioneers’ which represented the great poets such as the Iraqi poets Badr Shakir Al-Sayyab, Nazik Al-Mala'ika, Abd Al-Wahab Al-Bayyati, Buland Al-Haydari, Yusuf Al-Sa'igh, the Egyptian poets Salah Abd al-Sabur, Amal Dunqul, Yusuf Idris, Lewis Awad, the Syrian poets Adonis (Ali Ahmad Said), Muhammad al-Maghut, Yusuf al-Khal, Nizar Qabbani, the Lebanese poets Khalil Hawi, Unsi al-Haj, the Palestinian poets Tawfiq Sayigh, Mahmud Darwish, Samih Al-Qasim, and other poets from the Arabic Gulf to the Atlantic Ocean such as the Sudanese novelist Tayyeb Salih and the Sudanese poet Muhammad Al-Faituri, the Bahraini poet Qasim Haddad, the Moroccan poet Mohammad Bennis, the Yemeni poet Abd al-Aziz Al-Maqalih, the Saudi Arabian

¹⁸Adonis, *Al-Thabit wa Al-Mutahawwil: Sadmat Al-Hadathah* [The Static and The Changing: The Shock of Modernity] vol. 3 (Beirut: Dar al-Odah, 1978).

¹⁹Salma Khadra Jayyusi, “Modernist Poetry in Arabic”, ed, M. M. Badawi, *Modern Arabic Literature* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1992) 132-179.

poet and novelist Ghazi al-Gosaibi, the Kuwaiti poet Su'ad Al-Mubarak Al-Sabah.

1.3. Literary life of Badr Shakir Al-Sayyab (1926 -1964)

In Jaikur, a small village in Basra, south of Iraq, Badr Shakir Al-Sayyab was born and brought up to become one of the leaders of Arabic free verse movement and a pioneer of Arabic Modernism. Although he died at the age of thirty-eight, his poetry occupies a prominent place in modern Arabic poetry. His birthplace, i.e. Jaikur, figures significantly in his literary career. Therefore, it is no surprise that his poems immortalize Jaikur. His mother passed away when he was six-year this began his journey of suffering and sorrow.

Al-Sayyab began his schooling in Bab Sulaiman village until the fourth grade, and then he was transferred to Abu Al-Khasib. When he completed his elementary schooling, he shifted to al-Basra city to join Al-Basra secondary school. After his graduation from the secondary school in 1942, he left for Baghdad and joined the 'Higher Teacher Training College' in 1943. There he joined the Department of Arabic and studied Arabic literature for two years, when he was stopped from college in 1946 for seven months on charge of being a follower of the communist party. Later, he was arrested for participating in a demonstration against the British policy in Palestine. After his release, he returned to the college, but changed his course from Arabic literature to English literature. In 1948, Al-Sayyab graduated from college and joined as an English language teacher in al-Ramadi High School. At the High School, Al-Sayyab got an opportunity to restart his political activities. In other words, he propagated the tenets of communism to students to convince them of its promise of a class-less society. There he spent three months in teaching, but due to his communist leanings, he was fired from the job, and

was arrested again. After spending three months in prison, he was released. He went back to his village disappointingly as an unemployed person. Later on, Al-Sayyab found a job at the Oil Company in al-Basra city and worked for a year, and then left for Baghdad. Al-Sayyab realized that Baghdad was the right place for him to gain literary reputation and obtain satisfying job and experience. In Baghdad, Al-Sayyab became involved in political activities again. In 1952, Al-Sayyab was accused of inciting violence and disorder in Baghdad which triggered the burning of a police station and the death of many people. Consequently, the authorities began to track and chase those who rampaged the city of Baghdad: vandalizing, ravaging, and murdering and destroying. These smoking-out operations forced him to disguise himself as a Bedouin so that he could escape to Iran and then to Kuwait where he stayed for six months and met some other members of the Iraqi Communist party who had fled from Iraq.

Al-Sayyab, as a poet, had an aversion to accepting imposed restrictions and blind submission to the policy of the party. The dispute between Al-Sayyab and the communist comrades began because of Al-Sayyab's preference to read Eliot and Shakespeare over the Russian communist writers. For the comrades, Shakespeare and T.S. Eliot are 'reactionary' writers while the communist poets are liberal, progressive and radical. Therefore, Al-Sayyab was denounced and was accused of disloyalty to the communist party. When he was in Kuwait, he wrote great poems such as *Arms and Children*, *The Blind Harlot*, *A Stranger on the Gulf* and his masterpiece *The Rain Song* which was later published in his collection *Unshudat Al-Matar (The Rain Song)*. Six months later, Al-Sayyab returned to Baghdad from Kuwait. He showed the poems which were composed in Kuwait to the comrades in Baghdad, hoping to win their support and get them

published, but the comrades neglected him and delayed the publication of his poems. Al-Sayyab noticed that the communist comrades willfully ignored and disregarded his contributions and struggles for the party, while his contemporary Abd al-Wahab al-Bayyati enjoyed a prestigious status among the comrades in Baghdad. They supported and encouraged him to publish his first collection *Abariq Muhashamah* [Smashed Pitchers]. Feeling marginalized amongst the communist comrades, chased and ostracized by the Iraqi government, Al-Sayyab thought of breaking away from the party. In addition, Al-Sayyab had an admiration for Arab nationalism. These reasons altogether led him to sever all relations with the Iraqi communist party that showed no sympathy to the key concerns, such as the Palestinian issue. In 1954, Al-Sayyab abandoned the Iraqi Communist party which was founded by some Arab intellectuals as a liberal system against imperialism and colonialism to join the Arab nationalist party, replacing communism by nationalism.

In 1955, Al-Sayyab married Iqbal, a lady from his city, Al-Basra, and they had two daughters, Ghaida and Ala'a and a boy, Ghailan. The period in which Al-Sayyab lived was characterized by political disorder. He was born during the British mandate of Iraq and witnessed the Second World War, the foundation of Israel, and many other turbulent events that occurred in the forties, fifties and the sixties of the twentieth century. Al-Sayyab led a miserable life during the political upheavals between the Iraqi oligarchic monarchy and its opposition. Even after the revolution of 1958, Al-Sayyab was imprisoned and was dismissed from his job. In 1961, Al-Sayyab left for Rome via Beirut to participate in a conference held during 16-20 October 1961, as he was invited to be

among the speakers on modern Arabic literature. When he returned to Baghdad, Al-Sayyab began his journey of anguish and began to lament his fate:

أهكذا السنون تذهب
أهكذا الحياة تنضب ؟
أحس أنني أذوب ، أتعب ،
أموت كالشجر .

Like that, do the years go by?
Like that, does the life dry out?
I feel I am wasting away
Getting fatigued
Dying like trees²⁰.

Al-Sayyab's health began to worsen dramatically and he used crutches to walk. In 1962, Al-Sayyab was admitted to a hospital in Beirut, and there he made a will requested his wife, Iqbal to forgive him and asked her to be caring, kind-hearted and sympathetic to his son Ghailan:

من مرضي ،
من السرير الأبيض
.....
من حلمي الذي يمدّ لي طريقه للمقبرة
.....
أكتبها وصيّة لزوجتي المنتظرة
وطفلي الصارخ في رقاده : " أبي ، أبي " ،
.....

²⁰From Al-Sayyab's poem "Dar Jaddi" [Home of My Grandfather], my translation.

إقبال يا زوجتي الحبيبة
لا تعذليني ما المنيا بيدي
ولست لو نجوت بالمخد
كوني لغيلان رضى وطيه
كوني له أبا و أما و ارحمي نحييه

From my illness,

From the white bed,

.....

From my dream, that prolongs the graveyard path

.....

A will I am writing to my awaiting wife

And to my child in his cot, crying: "Dad, Dad".

.....

Oh, Iqbal, my beloved wife

Chide me not; never is death in my hand

And I am not, if saved, immortal

Be for Ghailan solicitousness and kindness

Be for him a father and a mother

And have mercy on his wailing²¹.

At the end of 1962, Al-Sayyab was granted a fellowship to Durham University, London by the Representative of the International Association for Cultural Freedom, to study and receive medical treatment. He was admitted to St. Mary's Hospital in London where his illness was diagnosed. Unfortunately, the doctor reported that Al-Sayyab had a

²¹From Al-Sayyab's poem "Al-Wasiyah" [The Will], my translation.

serious illness. In 1963, he traveled to Paris where he was informed that he had an incurable disease. As a result, he returned to Iraq and began to lament:

كسبح أنا اليوم كالميتين

أنادي فتعوي ذناب الصدى في القفار :

"كسبح

كسبح و ما من مسيح"

.....

وياليتني مت . .

Crippled I am today like the dead

I yell out, and the wolves of echo howl back in the wilderness:

Crippled, crippled, but no Messiah (can be found)

.....

Oh, I wish I had died²². . .

In his poem "Before the Gate of Allah", Al-Sayyab, in an earnest supplication, begs the Almighty Allah to take back his life. His ultimate wish was to die and get relieved from the nagging and burning aches and pains:

Cast down before your great gate

I cry out, in the darkness, for asylum

O you who guide the ants in the sand

And hear the pebbles on the streambed

I cry out like thunder in a mountain cave

Like the sigh of the noonday heat. (Khoury 83)

In the following lines he recites his surrender to the will of God and praises Him

²²From Al-Sayyab's poem "Louis MacNeice", 1964, my translation.

for the illness. Al-Sayyab confesses that he had committed sins and asks forgiveness:

I want to sleep in your holy shrine
 Beneath a blanket of sin and error
 Cradled in whores' convulsions
 So your hands would disdain to touch me. (Khouri 85)

Al-Sayyab left the hospital in Beirut and headed towards Al Basra, and then to Kuwait for treatment. He was admitted to the Prince Hospital in Kuwait in July 1964. The illness was diagnosed as ALS (Amyotrophic Lateral Sclerosis) and his condition was found hopeless. Al-Sayyab became bedridden and suffered because of his brittle bones. Day by day, Al-Sayyab became more anxious and disappointed because he lost the hope of cure and recovery. Although he was disabled and could not use any parts of his body, his mind was still active and brilliant. He composed a number of great poems, best of which are "Louis MacNeice"²³ and "In the Forest of Darkness". Eventually, Al-Sayyab died on 24 December 1964, leaving behind, his wife, a son and a daughter. He passed away at the age of 38, bequeathing splendid collections of poems. Al-Sayyab's poems do not only express and tackle his own personal problem, but also often deal with the problems of Iraq and other Arab countries such as the occupied Palestine, Algeria, Morocco and Egypt, which were under Western colonization. Due to the traumatic events during his time, Al-Sayyab dealt with the social and political themes in Iraq and the Arab world.

Al-Sayyab began his literary career as a poet at a very early age. When he was in the first grade at an elementary school, he wrote his first poem in colloquial language. He composed his first poem in standard Arabic when he was in the fifth grade. His poetic

²³This poem is a lament for the Irish poet Louis MacNeice.

and artistic abilities flourished during the adolescent period and he began his literary career as a romantic poet. Al-Sayyab's romantic poetry began when he was in secondary school. He was highly influenced by the breathtaking beauty of the countryside especially his village, Jaikur, which he repeatedly commemorated in his poetry as the most prominent village in modern Arabic literature. While he was attending secondary school, Al-Sayyab fell in love with a shepherd lady in his village, but his love story, as observed by some writers, was unrequited kind of love. In his book *Badr Shaker Al-Sayyab: Dirasah Fi Hayatih Wa Shi'reh* [Badr Shaker Al-Sayyab: A Study of his Life and Poetry], Ihsan Abbas states that Al-Sayyab portrays himself as a shepherd who croons a melancholy melody over and over again:

لأجلك أطوي الربى شاردة أردد أنغامي الضائعة
وأسكب في الناي قلبي الكئيب فتغمره النشوة الخادعة

For thy sake, I traverse over the hilly terrains absent-minded,

Humming along my lost tunes

And pouring in the flute my melancholy heart

And so (my heart) overflowed with the false ecstasy.²⁴ (Abbas 28)

During his study in Baghdad, Al-Sayyab completed his first collection *Azhar Thabilah* [Wilted Flowers] in 1947. He was criticized by his fellow poets for giving his first collection such a pessimistic name, though he was in the full bloom of his youth. In response to those who blamed him for his cheerless title, he wished they had lived with him and realized that the whole universe – earth, sky, soil, water, rock, and air – is withered for him. Throughout his literary life, Al-Sayyab composed ten collections:

²⁴ According to Ihsan Abbas, these lines are taken from Al-Sayyab's poem "Mizmar Al-Rae" [Pipe of the Shepherd], my translation.

Azhar Thabilah [Wilted Flowers, 1947], *Assateer* [Myths, 1950], *Haffar Al-Qubur* [The Gravedigger, 1951], *Al-Mumis Al-Amya* [The Blind Harlot, 1954], *Al-Aslihah wa-al-Atfal* [Weapons and Children, 1955], *Unshudat Al-Matar* [The Rain Song, 1960], *Al-Mabad Al-Ghareeq* [The Sunken Temple, 1962], *Mansil al-Aqnan* [The House of Slaves, 1963], *Shanasheel Ibnat Al-Jalabi* [The Balcony of the Nobleman's Daughter, 1964] and *Iqbal* [1965]. All of Al-Sayyab's poems were published in two volumes. The first volume contains five collections: *Azhar wa Asateer* [Flowers and Myths], *Al-Mabad Al-Ghareeq* [The Sunken Temple], *Manzil al-Aqnan* [The House of Slaves], *Unshudat Al-Matar* [The Rain Song] which contains the three long poems: "The Gravedigger", "The Blind Harlot and "Weapons and Children" and *The Balcony of the Nobleman's Daughter*. The second volume contains four collections: *Bawakeer* [First Fruits], *Qitharat Al-Rih* [Aeolian Harp], *A'aasseer* [Storms] and *Al-Hadaya* [The Gifts] as well as his long poem "Fajr Al-Salaam" [Dawn of Peace]. Most poems of Al-Sayyab's second volume were composed during the years between 1941 and 1944.

Al-Sayyab nourished his poetic talent by reading about the Arabic traditional heritage, the Iraqi mythologies, and the Bible. He read the ancient Arab poets like Al-Mutanabi, Abu Tammam and Al-Buhturi and the modern Arabic literature especially the *Mahjar* poetry (poetry of Arab emigrant poets). Al-Sayyab was interested in romantic poetry and was highly fond of two Arab romantic poets: the Lebanese poet Ilyas Abu Shabakah and the Egyptian poet Ali Mahmud Taha. While he was a student of English literature, Al-Sayyab studied Shakespeare, Milton, Victorian and romantic poets. He was also interested in Shelley. Nevertheless, he deeply admired the English modernist poets like Thomas Stearns Eliot and Edith Sitwell. He read French literature in Arabic

translation, particularly the poems of Charles Baudelaire. According to Naji Allush, Al-Sayyab read Arabic, Russian and English literatures and studied the Quran, the Torah, and the Bible as well as Marxist thoughts and some of the Western doctrines. Al-Sayyab established his reputation as a talented poet among his colleagues while he was a student in Baghdad. However, he was not satisfied with himself and his life:

ماذا جنيت من الزمان سوى الكآبة والنحول
أو أراقب الليل الطويل يذوب في الصبح الطويل
وأتابع الشمس المرنحة الشعاع إلى الأفول
وأشيع البدر السؤوم يغيب ما بين النخيل
لا مأمل لي بالكثير ولا رجاء بالقليل
وأعد أيامي لأسلمها إلى الهم الثقيل

Oh, what I gained from time, but melancholy and emaciation.

Or I observe the long night dissolves into the long morning

And I attend to the swaying beam of the sun to its final dissipation

And I escort the monotonous (full) moon, vanishes in the palm trees.

Neither much hope nor little plea do I have

And I count my days to hand them over to the heavy grief.²⁵ (Abbas 55)

Al-Sayyab's second collection *Assateer* [Myths] was composed in the penultimate year of his study at college which appeared in 1950. This collection reveals the duality of the poet's nature where he juxtaposed images of love and death, light and dark. In this collection, the poet's dual personality is presented sometimes as a struggler and striver and at some other times as retrogressive and introverted. In the introduction to this

²⁵According to Ihsan Abbas, these lines are taken from Al-Sayyab's poem "Fi Yaomon Abis" [In a Glowered Day, 1946], my translation.

collection, Al-Sayyab stated that he intended to conceal his love affairs in his poetry therefore; some poems in his collections appear vague and obscure. He enjoyed a positive attitude towards the woman and this is revealed in the early bereavement of his mother. Yearning for the motherly love and affection he lost in his childhood, he spent his life seeking for the love and kindness of a woman instead.

Al-Sayyab's collection *Unshudat Al-Matar* [The Rain Song] represents a new phase of modern Arabic poetry because of its new themes and techniques, especially the use of symbols, images, and myths. This collection contains thirty-two poems among which his distinguished poem "Unshudat Al-Matar" [The Rain Song] stands magnificent. Many poems in this collection were translated into English, for example, "Gharib Ala Al-Khalij" [A Stranger by the Gulf], "Al-Nahr wa Al-Mawt" [The River and Death], "Madinat Al-Sindibad" [City of Sindibad], "Al-Masih Bad Al-Salb" [Christ after Crucifixion], "Fi Al-Maghrib Al-Arabi" [In the Arab Maghrib], "Al-Mukhbir" [The Informer], "Ughniya fi Shahr Aab" [Song in August], "Al-Awdah li Jaikur" [The Return to Jaikur], "Garcia Lorca", "Jaikur wa Al-Madinah" [Jaikur and the City], "Risalah min Maqbarah" [A Message from the Graveyard], "Al-Mabgha" [The Whorehouse], "Tha'lab al-Mawt" [The Fox of Death] as well as the three long poems: "Haffar Al-Qubur" [The Gravedigger], "Al-Mumis Al-Amya" [The Blind Harlot], "Al-Aslihah wa-Al-Atfal" [Weapons and Children].

Al-Sayyab's masterpiece in this collection is "The Rain Song" composed in 1953, when he was in Kuwait as an exile. This celebrated poem was translated into English fourteen times; even its title has been rendered into English in various ways like "Hymn to Rain", "Hymn of Rain", "Rain Song" and "The Rain Song". When "The Rain Song"

was published in *Al-Adab* magazine in 1954 for the first time, it established the pioneering role of Al-Sayyab's poetry among his contemporaries because of its new technique and its strong diction. The poem played a key role in strengthening Arabic free verse as a new form in Arabic poetry. Critics and writers have analyzed Al-Sayyab's "The Rain Song" more than his other poems because of its new poetic image. Al-Sayyab's poem "The Rain Song" is much more than a song or a hymn which celebrates rainfall or a revelation of the poet's feelings of happiness when he beholds the drops of rain. Actually, the poem has a different dimension. Here, rain does not refer to a rebirth of nature, of life among barren and infertile lands; rather it has a political dimension. On the one hand, it articulates the writer's opposition to the regime of Nuri al-Said. On the other, the poem reveals the poet's deep anguish, rather than gladness and pleasure. Therefore, the drops of tears are metaphorically associated with the drops of rain. The polarity between image of rain in the title of the poem and what it actually communicates in the content emphasizes the contradictory life of Arabs who suffer greatly from untold misery and economic depression in spite of the enormous and substantial resources of wealth in the Arab world. The word 'rain' is symbolic of life, fertility and resurrection; and the word 'song' or 'hymn' denotes joyfulness and exultation. However, Al-Sayyab's lexical choice of the word 'rain' is significant. It symbolizes tears (lamenting), death, hunger, poverty, immigration and the misery of the Iraqi people. 'The Rain Cry' would have been an appropriate translation of the title. Al-Sayyab ironically called it "The Rain Song", crows and locusts feed and destroy the harvest of rain while Iraqi people suffer a misery life despite the huge natural resources and wealth in the country:

I cry to the Gulf, "O Gulf,

O giver of pearls, shells and death”.

The echo comes back

Like sobs,

“O Gulf,

O giver of shells and death”

I can almost hear Iraq gathering thunder

And storing up lightning in mountains and plains

.....

And there is hunger in Iraq!

The harvest season scatters the crops in it

So that ravens and locusts have their full

While a millstone in the fields surrounded by human beings

Grinds the granaries and the stones.²⁶

Naji Allush²⁷ points out that Al-Sayyab’s literary life has gone through four phases: Romanticism from 1934 to 1948, Realism from 1949 to 1955, and the Tammuzian phase from 1956 to 1960, and finally the Subjectivity or Personality phase from 1961 to 1964. He wrote national poems which express and demonstrate his solidarity with the Arab issues such as “Ila Jamila Bouhired” [To Jamila Bouhired], “Risalah min Maqbarah” [A Message from Graveyard], “Fi al-Maghrib al-Arabi” [In the Arab Maghrib], “Rabie Al-Jaza’er” [Algeria’s Spring], “Bur Said” [Port Said]. He also wrote political poems such as “Haffar al-Qubur” [The Gravedigger], “Al-Mumis al-Amya” [The Blind Harlot], “Al-Aslihah wa Al-Atfal” [Weapons and Children], “Min

²⁶Issa J. Boullata, trans and ed, *Modern Arab Poets 1950 1975* (London: Heinemann, 1976) 8.

²⁷Allush’s preface to Al-Sayyab’s Collection, vol. I.

Ru'ya Fukai" [From Fukai's Vision], "Garcia Lorca", "Al-Mabgha" [The Whorehouse], "Ruya fi Aam 1956" [Vision in 1956] and "Al-Awdah li Jaikur" [Return to Jaikur]. Another significant aspect of his literary career is that he read Frazer's *The Golden Bough* and wrote many poems that dealt with mythology such as "Al-Masih Bad al-Salb" [Christ after Crucifixion], "Jaikur wa Al-Madinah" [Jaikur and the City], "Cerberus in Babel", "Madinat Al-Sindibad" [The City of Sindibad], "Unshudat Al-Matar" [The Rain Song]. In the last phase of his life, Al-Sayyab's poetry turned to be very personal and emotional due to his illness and his deep anguish at the emphatic, inevitable, final and tearful farewell to his wife and children. From his childhood till his death, Al-Sayyab's life was an agonizing journey. He was orphaned in his childhood, was persecuted in his youth, suffered poverty, imprisonment, and eventually he was struck by fatal illness.

1.4. Literary Life of Salah Abd al-Sabur (1931-1981)

In the countryside of Al-Zaqaziq a city in Egypt, the Arab modernist poet and playwright Salah Abd al-Sabur was born. He grew up in Cairo when Egypt was a semi-independent country and under the British colonization. He completed his secondary school in 1947 and then joined the Department of Arabic in the Faculty of Arts at Cairo University. He graduated in 1951 and commenced his career as a teacher in secondary institutes till 1958. Abd al-Sabur evinced a serious interest in journalism; therefore, he resigned from teaching for the sake of his new job as an editor of *Rose al-Yusuf*, a weekly magazine, from 1959 to 1962 and of *Al-Ahram* newspaper from 1962 to 1967. He was also appointed director of the Egyptian Publishing House for Composition and Translation. From 1969 to 1970, he worked as the chief editor of *Al-Masrah* magazine

and as chief editor of *Al-Katib* magazine from 1974 to 1975. He also worked as cultural attaché of the Egyptian Embassy in New Delhi from 1976 to 1979. Eventually, his final career was as director of General Egyptian Institute for Book. In 1958, Abd al-Sabur married a presenter whose name was Nabila Yaseen, but they separated in 1963. Then, he married Samiha Ghaleb in 1964 who was also working as a presenter. He had two daughters from his second wife, the elder was named Mai and the younger one was Mu'taza. In 1981, Abd al-Sabur died due to cardiac arrest.

Abd al-Sabur displayed a tendency to write poetry at an early age. His poetic talent flourished in adolescence. He started writing poetry in the traditional style; later, he discarded the techniques of traditional poetry in favour of new poetic techniques, adopting a new form and content for his poetry. Abd al-Sabur was fond of philosophy, history, mythology, psychology, sociology and anthropology. He is among the pioneers and one of the pillars of Arabic modernism in Egypt and one of the founders of Arabic free verse movement along with Badr Shakir Al-Sayyab and Nazik al-Malaika. Arab critics dispute the pioneering of Arabic free verse movement: Iraqi critics assert that “Al-Kulira” poem by the Iraqi poetess Nazik al-Malaika along with Badr Shakir Al-Sayyab’s poem “Hal Kana Hubban” are the first Arabic poems written in free verse. The Egyptian critics argue that Luis Awad is the first Arab poet wrote in free verse and the Yemeni poet and critic Abd Al-Aziz Al-Maqalih asserts that Ali Ahmed Bakatheer is the first poet who wrote a poem in free verse. However, the pioneering of Arabic free verse movement is a collective pioneering rather than an individual contribution. According to M. M. Badawi, Abd al-Sabur is “the leading Egyptian poet of his generation when he turned to

writing poetic drama.”²⁸ Badawi also maintains that Abd al-Sabur’s work “marks the most serious and accomplished development of Arabic poetic drama to date.”²⁹

Like Al-Sayyab, Abd al-Sabur began his literary career as a romantic poet who recoiled from Romanticism to Modernism. Abd al-Sabur’s first collection of poetry is *Al-Nas fi Biladi* [The People in My Country, 1957] was written while he was passionately in reading the philosophy of materialism. According to the poet himself, this collection adopts his ideology in that period of his life. Abd al-Sabur was optimistic and broadminded in spite of his sadness. The touch of sorrow is apparent in his collection *Aqulu Lakum* [I Say unto You]. The poems of this collection portray Abd al-Sabur’s philosophy of life. The first poem in his collection *Aqulu Lakum* [I Say unto You] is “Al-Shaye al-Hazeen” [The Sad Object]. The notable poem of this collection bears the title of the collection and contains eight sections: “Mn Ana” [Who Am I], “Al-Hobb” [The Love], “Al-Huriyyah wa al-Maut”, [Freedom and Death], “Al-Kalimat” [The Words], “Al-Qiddees” [The Saint], “Al-Suq wa Al-Suqah” [The Market and the Rabble], “Maut Al-Insan” [The Death of Man], and “Ujafikom Li A'arifukom” [I Abandon You to Know You]. Abd al-Sabur is also a leading dramatist of modern Arabic literature due to his contribution to the Arabic poetic drama. The first work of his poetic drama was *Masat Al-Hallaj* [The Tragedy of Al-Hallaj, 1965] which depicts the public trial of the historical and controversial figure al-Husain Ibn Mansur Al-Hallaj and his execution and crucifixion in Baghdad in 922. This poetic drama has political dimensions because Abd al-Sabur composed it to protest against the dictatorship of the president of Egypt, Jamal Abd al-Nasir. Al-Hallaj stands for the Arab intelligentsia who face oppression from the

²⁸M. M. Badawi, *Modern Arabic Drama in Egypt* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1987) 220.

²⁹Ibid, 227-228.

Arabic regimes. Abd al-Sabur presents Al-Hallaj as a hero who speaks on behalf of the poor and the oppressed:

Hallaj: Me? Suspect me? Of What?

Ibrahim: They say,

“This man slanders the Sultan

And stirs up the people to hatred.

The judge asks me to convey his plea to you

That you should be discreet.

Hallaj: What have they against me? What am I being blamed for?

For talking with my friends,

And saying, the heart of the nation is the king,

Its righteousness depends upon his own righteousness?

Talking with my friends, and saying,

If you are put in power, do not neglect to pour the

Wine of authority into the cups of justice?

Or am I blamed at crying out for those

Whom I see walking towards death,

Whose path to death leads them away from God

Who rules over death?

Ibrahim: They claim that you have sent some secret word

To Abi Bakr Al-Madhirra'I, Tuluni, Hamad al-Qana'I

And to others, too who hope to seize power.

Hallaji: The men you name are leaders of the nation;

They are also my friends, and have my love.
 They promised me if they should come to power
 They will live righteously and not do ill;
 They will grant the people their rights,
 And the people will render them theirs.
 They are my prime hope in this world, my dear Ibrahim,
 Therefore, I quench their thirst with thought,
 Refresh them with gentle words³⁰. (Semaan 16)

Abd al-Sabur's poetry was published in six collections: *Al-Nas fi Biladi* [The People in My Country, 1957], *Aqulu Lakum* [I Say unto You, 1961], *Ahlam Al-Faris Al-Qadeem* [Dreams of the Old Knight, 1964], *Ta'ammulat fi Zaman Jarih* [Contemplations in an Injured Time, 1970], *Al-Ibhar fi Al-Dhakira* [Sailing in Memory, 1977] and *Shajar al-Layl* [Trees of Night, 1973]. His poetic dramas were published in five collections: *Ameerah Tantazir* [The Princess Waits, 1971], *Masat Al-Hallaj* [Tragedy of al-Hallaj, 1965], *Musafir Layl* [A Night Traveller, 1969], *Layla wa'l-Majnun* [Layla and The Madman, 1970] and *Ba'd an Yamut al-Malik* [When the King Dies, 1975]. Like Al-Sayyab, Abd al-Sabur globalizes his poetic career through his writing about poets from other cultures such as Lorca and Baudelaire.

In his book *Hayati fi Al-Sh'ir* [My Life in Poetry] Abd al-Sabur points out that his innovation was due to his interest in reading a considerable variety of Arabic and Western literary works. From the Arabic cultural and poetic heritage, he admired the pre-Islamic poets such as *Al-Sa'alik* (brigand-poets who lived in pre-Islamic period), Al-

³⁰Khalil I. Semaan, trans, *Murder in Baghdad* (Ma'sat Al-Hallaj), Salah Abd al-Sabur (Leiden: Brill, 1972) 16.

A'sha, Imru' Al-Qais and Tarafah Ibn Al-Abd and the Abbasid poets like Bashar Ibn Burd, *Abu-al-Ala Al-Marri*, Abu Nuwas, Ibn Al-Rumi, and Al-Mutanabbi. He also had avid interest in Hameed Bin Thawr al-Hilaly, Umar Ibn Abi Rabi'ah, and Waddah al-Yaman. He read much of Arabic poetic heritage including wisdom poetry and Sufi poetry. From Western literary works, he read the French poet Baudelaire and the German poet Rainer Maria Rilke as well as the English poets John Donne, W. B. Yeats and T. S. Eliot. Abd al-Sabur does not consider Arabic modernism as a separation of the past or a breakaway from the cultural heritage; he advocates the national heritage of Arabs. He considers poetry as a genuine work only when it is purely self-communion. Abd al-Sabur was infatuated with Marxism at the beginning and his poem “Al-Nas fi Biladi” [People in my Country] tells the story of a village oppressed by religious precepts:

People in my country are ferocious like falcons
 Their singing is like a winter tremor in the top of tress
 Their laughing sizzles like fire in the wood
 Their footsteps want to sink in the earth
 They kill, steal, drink and belch
 But they are men
 And are good-hearted when they have a handful of coins
 And they are believers in Destiny.³¹

After one decade of admiration for Marxism, Abd al-Sabur turned to existentialism. He left community to think of the individual world. Eventually, he returned to the religious shelter and said, “Now I am in peace with Allah”. “I do believe that every addition to humanity is a step forward to perfection; to God proper”. Abd al-

³¹Issa J. Boullata, trans and ed, *Modern Arab Poets 1950-1975* (London: Heinemann, 1976) 71.

Sabur, apart from his contribution to Arabic free verse movement, which appeared in the 1940s; also had significant influence was over modern Arabic poetic drama.

CHAPTER TWO

MODERNIST POETICS: THEMES AND TECHNIQUES

2.1. Concept of Western/Arabic Modernism

2.1.1. Western Modernism

At the outset, tracing the root of the word ‘modernism’ in English lexicon is the keystone in tracing the term’s development and how it was coined and introduced as a new concept in critical studies. Yet, modernism can be interpreted and understood more clearly through tracing its philosophical grounds rather than tracing its semantic and linguistic denotations or connotations. The term ‘modernism’ is not an antonym to the term ‘tradition’. Linguistically, it is derived from the words ‘mod’, ‘mode’, and ‘modern’, but the word ‘modern’ seems to be relatively the main root of the word ‘modernism’. Historically, the word ‘modern’ was used in the 14th century to denote a person of the present time who repudiates and renounces the conventions of the past. In the 15th century it was used to refer to works of the modern architecture, then in the 16th century it was used to denote a person with modern tastes and also to refer to the current form of a language. *Moderne*, in the middle French language, is used to mean ‘modern’. The word ‘modern’ means ‘present’ or ‘just now’. It goes back to the French word ‘moderne’ which in turn goes back to Latin word *modernus*, which is derived from the Latin word ‘modo’. The respective term then took its circulation in various fields of human activities. The phrase ‘modern art’ appeared in 1849, and ‘modern dance’ appeared in 1912. In his book *Modernism the New Critical Idiom*, Peter Childs says that modern English is different from middle English and the modern period in literature starts from the 16th century, although it is used to describe twentieth-century writing. The term ‘modernist’, according to Peter Childs, was used in the late 16th century to name a

modern person, then in the 18th century was used to denote the follower of modern ways and the supporter of modern literature over ancient. The Romanian literary critic Matei Calinescu, in his article “Literary and Other Modernisms”¹, explains that the label of modernism was used for the first time by Ruben Dario² in the early 1890s. The various movements in art, architecture and literature, which break with classical and traditional forms and methods of expression, are categorized under the umbrella term modernism.

Modernism is a neologism invented by critics as a critical concept. However, the proponents of modernism could not offer a final, definite and clear definition of modernism. No two critics have concurred with each other on what modernism is³. The Czech formalist, Jan Mukarovsky pinpoints that modernism is ‘very indefinite’⁴. According to the book *Modernism: Critical Concepts in Literary and Cultural Studies*, modernism is a critical notion that defies definition because the term ‘modernism’ encompasses “contested and varied nature of the intellectual terrain.”⁵ For Perry Anderson, “modernism as a notion is the emptiest of all cultural categories. Unlike the terms Gothic, Renaissance, Baroque, Mannerist, Romantic or Neo-Classical, it designates no describable object in its own right: it is completely lacking in positive content.”⁶

Critics attempt to explicate the term ‘modernism’ by pinpointing the key features of modernism; focusing on the historical dimension and looking at enlightenment and the global shift. Modernism is a violation of norm. It attempts to break with the tradition. Critics agree to regard modernism as a condition of social, artistic, economic, and

¹Tim Middleton, ed, *Modernism Critical Concepts In Literary and Cultural Studies*, vol. 3 (London: Routledge, 2003) 201.

²Ruben Dario (1867-1916) was a Nicaraguan writer and poet.

³Steve Giles ed, *Theorizing Modernism* (London: Routledge, 1993) 2.

⁴Ibid.

⁵Tim Middleton, ed, *Modernism: Critical concepts in Literary and cultural studies*, vol. 1 (London: Routledge, 2003) 1.

⁶Michael H. Whitworth, ed, *Modernism* (Malden: Blackwell, 2007) 3.

technological change. The French writer Victor Hugo articulates that modernism is the power, which goes deeply in all directions; and there is no sentence which can give a perfect description to its features or surround all its aspects. The German philosopher, Jurgen Habermas says that modernism is the development of Western society and its dependence on reason as a standard of judgments rather than its adherence to past.

This intellectual development occurs due to a notion of superiority of the individual. In other words, the individual is considered rational, democratic and a freethinker. Some critics, like Susan Stanford, define modernism as a global tendency in art and literature, while other critics define modernism within specific countries. Among them is Peter Faulkner, who confines modernism to the works of some Anglo-American writers, such as T. S. Eliot and Ezra Pound, to the works of Virginia Woolf and D. H. Lawrence. Writers and critics present contradictory views about modernism. Some argue that modernism rejects the traditional values and encourages creativity, innovation and subjectivity. Others argue that modernism is a reaction to the cruel urban societies, industrialization, and the absence of the human values which led to the world wars. According to Michael H Whitworth, “modernism is not so much a thing as a set of responses to problems posed by the conditions of modernity.”⁷

Still, others define modernism as ‘a new visualization of life, or a new consciousness of the latest changes, which jump over the old constants and the old traditional styles’. Modernism is considered as a torrential stream, which reaches all fields of life in its continuous growth. The modernist experiment aims at releasing the individual from the collective. For Susan Stanford, modernism is “the expressive dimension of modernity”. Sonja Samberger in his book *Artistic Outlaws: The Modernist*

⁷Ibid.

Poetics of Edith Sitwell, Amy Lowell, Gertrude Stein and H. D. he states:

Modernism can be seen as a generic term which comprises many different international artistic and literary movements of the first half of the twentieth century: the (so-called classical) avant-gardes whose beginnings are usually fixed by numerous manifestos (Cubism in 1907, Futurism in 1908, Dada in 1916, Surrealism in 1924). ... Modernism is a term for all these different movements, whose common feature is the reaction to the modernization of our world, to increasing mechanization, to Sigmund Freud's new insights into psychology, to the First World War. This reaction shows in different shapes in different literatures in form as well as in content. (Samberger 19)

2.1.2. Arabic Modernism

Literally, *Al-Hadathah* means creating what did not exist before.⁸ In the Arabic lexicons, the origin of the word '*Al-Hadathah*' is the root '*Hadatha*' from which the term '*Al-Hadathah*' is derived. In the lexicon of *Lisan Al-Arab*⁹, the words *Hadatha*, *Yahduthu*, *Huduthan*, and *Hadathah* mean something that has not existed before. The word *Hadath* stands as the opposite of 'old'. In the lexicon of *Al-Qamus Al-Muheet*¹⁰, the verb *Hadatha* is the root of *Al-Hadathah*. In the modern lexicon of *Al-Mu'jam Al-Waseet*¹¹, the word *Al-Hadathah* is antithetical to the word 'old'. It also means 'the age of youth'. *Al-Hadathah*, hence, is a new literary development in Arabic literature, and is

⁸ Abd Al-Majeed Zaraqet, *Al-Hadathah fi Al-Naqd Al-Adabi Al-Mu'asir* [Modernism in The Contemporary Literary Criticism] (Beirut: Dar Al-Harf Al-Arabi, 1991) 195.

⁹ Ibn Mandhur, comp, *Lisan Al-Arab* [Tongue of Arabs], Beirut: Dar Sader, 2000.

¹⁰ *Al-Qamus Al-Muheet* is an old Arabic lexicon compiled by Al-Fayruzabadi (1329 – 1415).

¹¹ An Arabic lexicon compiled by Ibrahim Mustafa, *Al-Mu'jam Al-Waseet* (Cairo: Al-Majma, 1960).

mainly associated with poetry. It intertwines with other terms such as *Hadith* [modern], *Tahdith* [modernization], *Asranah* [modernity] *Mu'asir* or *Asri* [contemporary], *Jiddah* [novelty/newness], *Jadid* [new], *Ibda'a* [innovation], *Jeel Al-Ttali'ah* [avant-gardes]. The Arabic terms *Mu'asir*, *Hadith*, and *Jadid* mean 'contemporary', 'modern' and 'new' respectively. These terms sometimes are used interchangeably; they have different literary significances. For the Arab literary critics, *Mu'asir* [contemporary] poetry does not mean *Hadathi* [modernist] poetry because not all *Mu'asir* [contemporary] poetry is characterized by the features of modernism. Furthermore, *Hadathi* [modernist] poetry has been traced back in the works of some Arab poets of the last centuries.

Arab writers in their attempts to explore Arabic modernism [*Al-Hadathah*] had difficulty in offering a rigorous definition to this elusive term. The Tunisian writer, Rita Awadh defines *Al-Hadathah* as awareness (consciousness) of life and existence. The Egyptian writer, Abd al-Aziz Hammouda defines it as a revolution against traditional form that caused a cultural gap in Arab society. The Syrian poet and critic, Adonis says that he could not easily determine what modernism is in the Arab society. In his book *Al-Thabit wa Al-Mutahawwil: Sadmat Al-Hadathah* [The Static and The Changing: The Shock of Modernism] he states that modernism artistically means radical questioning which explores and traces the poetic language that opens up new experimental horizons in practical writing and the creation of new styles of expression which are logically compatible to that questioning. He adds that literary modernism is an experiment and a vision, which develops new ways of interpreting.

For Adonis, modernism is essentially a violation of the political, ethical, and constitutional sovereignty. In other words, it is a rejection of the idealized standards of

the ancient. Other critics refer to Arabic modernism as a collection of various meanings such as conversion, invention, renewal, revolution, question, refusal, initiation and consciousness. For Adonis, poetic modernism is linked with humanistic modernism that surpasses the past, the technique and the future; it connects with time and goes beyond time¹². Yusuf Al-Khal¹³ links modernism with innovation, and describes modernism as a violation of poetic norms which do not belong to a specific time. Dr. Ibrahim Al-Samarra'i¹⁴ argues that Arabic modernism is a continuation of modernisms that came earlier. He states that Arabic modernism is every new technique associated with the development of Arabic poetry. According to the Moroccan writer and poet, Abdul Latif Al-Le'abi, Arabic modernism lies in the ability to change and revolt. He adds the modernist poet is the one who subverts the sacred linguistic expression. Mohamed Masmouli¹⁵ deals with Arabic modernism as an innovation. For Mohammad Bennis¹⁶, Arabic modernism breaks with the past and its heritage. Abdullah Ibrahim¹⁷ defines Arabic modernism as a new intellectual attitude and a philosophic vision that looks at the self and the universe through different perspectives: through inherited cultural references, and through the borrowed references from the other. Adonis says that some Arab thinkers treat modernism as a technological achievement and consequently westernized it.

2.1.3. Interchangeability between Modernism and Modernity

The term 'modernity' refers to the condition that is related to modernism. Modernity exclusively describes the industrial and radical changes of sociology, and

¹²Catherine Cbham, trans, *An Introduction to Arab Poetics*, Adonis (Cairo: American UP, 1992).

¹³Yusuf al-Khal (1917 - 1987) is a Syrian poet and founded the magazine *shi'r* (poetry) in Beirut in 1957.

¹⁴An Iraqi writer.

¹⁵A Tunisian poet.

¹⁶Mohammad Bennis (1948 -) is a Moroccan poet.

¹⁷Abdullah Ibrahim (1918 - 2005) born in Morocco, he was a famous critic.

psychology of 19th and 20th centuries. In his book *Modernism*, Michael H. Whitworth says:

The recognition that modernism and modernity are related but not identical is crucial to most recent work in the area. At one time it was possible to write of there being ‘two modernities’, one being the modernity of technology and social life, and the other being aesthetic modernity; more recently, critics have used modernism for the second of these, reserving ‘modernity’ for the social and ideological context¹⁸.

According to Matei Calinescu, both terms ‘modernism’ and ‘modernity’ go back etymologically to the concept of *la mode*.¹⁹ He argues that there are five faces of modernity and he regards modernism as one of these faces. Some writers, such as the Spanish poet and critic Federico de Onis emphasize that there is a difference between modernism and modernity²⁰. For the Italian literary critic Renato Poggioli²¹ “modernism is an involuntary caricature of modernity.” Initially modernity started in German in the works of the German thinkers and philosophers Kant and Hegel, Nietzsche and Heidegger, and then it spread in Europe. Habermas discusses the issue of modernity as an unfinished project or incomplete project. From a historical perspective, modernism is referred to be a critical of enlightenment and to be a prelude of Postmodernism. The modernist writers state that modernism is a critical interpretation of modernity and the modern world because modernity caused spiritual disaster. Modernity is inevitable and inescapable as it is related to the continuous process of changes in all aspects of human

¹⁸Michael H Whitworth, ed, *Modernism* (Malden: Blackwell, 2007) 17.

¹⁹Matei Calinescu “Literary and other Modernism”, Tim Middleton, ed, *Modernism Critical Concepts in Literary and Cultural Studies*, vol 3 (London: Routledge, 2003) 208.

²⁰Ibid.

²¹Ibid.

life: technological, economic, social, and political. Therefore, imperialism, secularism, democracy, technology and the conflict between socialism and capitalism, as well as the revolutions against the aristocratic regimes, are the most important characteristics of modernity. Modernism arose as a criticism of modernity which caused social, cultural and artistic changes. Criticism of modernity is a general denotation of literary modernism. In other words, modernism is essentially a philosophy of modernity that is characterized as a literary or artistic notion, while modernity is the on-going process of modernization. The terms 'modernism' and 'modernity' could be used interchangeably by some writers to indicate the 19th and the 20th century trends, and yet, the term 'modernism' does not merely refer to a period of time, but also refers to a new concept that arose to criticize the upheavals of modernity. In his essay "Modernity and Feminism", Rita Felski, highlights the difference between 'modernism' and 'modernity' as she notes:

Modernity arises out of a culture of 'stability, coherence, discipline and world-mastery'; alternatively it points to 'discontinuous experience of time, space and causality as transitory, fleeting and fortuitous'. For Some writers it is a 'culture of rupture' marked by historical relativism and ambiguity. For others it involves a 'rational autonomous subject' and an 'absolutist unitary conception of truth. ...The most familiar within the field of literary studies. Unlike modernity, it can be situated in historical time with a relative degree of precision; critics locate the high point of modernist literature and art between 1890 and 1940, while agreeing that modernist features can be found in texts both preceding and following this

period.²²

For Malcolm Bradbury and James McFarlane, modernism is ‘the art of modernization’ which ‘responds to the scenario’ of modern chaos²³. In his article “Avant-gard, Modernism, Modernity: A Theoretical Overview”, Steve Giles²⁴ says that the theorist Harvey attempts to ‘connect the definition of a modernist aesthetic to the material basis of modern life’ while Habermas emphasizes the significance of distinguishing between cultural modernity and societal modernization. According to Steve Gils, modernism is a cultural phenomenon but anti-modern although it is located ‘within the ambit of modernity’. He adds that ‘modernism was pressured into existence by the dynamics of time-space compression and separation; it can be characterized also as a classic product of modernity’²⁵. Thus, modernism is interrelated with modernity, whereas it is for some critics a product of modernity. Still other critics view ‘modernism’ as a subversive movement to the principles of modernity; it is also seen as an object for denouncing and vilifying societal and cultural traditions.

2.1.4. Modernism as an Apt Rendering of *Al-Hadathah*

Arabic modernism has been translated into English in different ways as *Hadatha*, *al-Hadatha*, and *Al-Hadathah*, as argued in this study. Some writers translate it as *Hadatha* without the prefix ‘al’ which functions as a definite article in Arabic and without the feminizing suffix ‘h’. Others translate it as *Al-Hadatha* with the definite article ‘al’ and without the suffix ‘h’. Rendering the Arabic term *Al-Hadathah* into

²²Rita Felski, “Modernity and Feminism”, Tim Middleton, ed, *Modernism: Critical Concepts in Literary and Cultural studies*, vol. 5 (London: Routledge, 2003) 195, 205.

²³Malcolm Bradbury and James McFarlane, ed. *Modernism 1890-1930* London: Penquin, 1976) 27.

²⁴Steve Giles, ed, *Theorizing Modernism* (London: Routledge, 1993) 177-178.

²⁵*Ibid*, 181.

English seems to be problematic due to the various translations offered by many Arab writers. The Arab writers and critics have not concurred with each other not only in their translating of the term *Al-Hadathah*, but also in their interpretations of it and in their attitude towards it in general. There are three different views in translating *Al-Hadathah* into English. The first opinion considers ‘modernity’ as a translation of the Arabic term *Al-Hadathah*, as in Adonis’ book *An Introduction to Arab Poetics*. Under the title ‘Poetics and Modernity’, Adonis says “We will only be able to reach a proper understanding of the poetics of Arab modernity by viewing it in its social, cultural and political context.”²⁶ Muhsin J. al-Musawi, in his book *Arabic Poetry Trajectories of Modernity and Tradition*, states:

Yet, modernity properly began with the emergence of coteries, groups, and schools that came into contact with Russia and Europe, and developed a new consciousness of individualism and democracy, like the Diwan School in Egypt (1912), with a publication under this name in 1921, and the following one Apollo (with a journal under this name, too, 1932–1934). Soon after the Second World War, another radical change under the rubric of the Free Verse Movement took over the poetic scene bringing into Arabic culture a new consciousness of great complexity that appropriated both radical politics and poetics, and approached tradition and history anew, questioning almost every issue and generating since then further renewals and innovations. (Al-Musawi 9)

In the same vein, the Syrian critic Kamal Abu Deeb also asserts that ‘modernity’ is the proper translation for the Arabic term *Al-Hadathah*. The second point of view

²⁶Adonis, *An Introduction to Arab Poetics*, Catherine Cobham, trans (Cairo: American UP, 1992) 75.

regards ‘modernism’ as a translation of *Al-Hadathah*. Supporters of this translation are the Egyptian critics Abdel Aziz Hamuudah, and Dr. Jaber Asfur (who has translated Peter Broker’s *Modernism and Postmodernism*) and Mu'yyad Hasan Fawzi who translated the book of *Modernism (1890-1930)* edited by Malcolm Bradbury and James McFarlane, as well as the Syrian writer and translator Issa Sum'an who translated the same book. The third view merges modernity and modernism claiming that both terms have the same significance. This view considers ‘modernism’ and ‘modernity’ as renderings of *Al-Hadathah*. For instance, the Palestinian writer and poet, Salma Khadra Jayyusi in her article “Modernist poetry in Arabic” states:

Arab poetic modernity resulted from two major factors: the influence of the Western modernist movement and the other major experiments that preceded or accompanied it, and the state of Arabic poetry itself at the midpoint of the twentieth century, which responded to intrinsic need for a change towards a more ‘modern’ apprehension of experience, aesthetic and otherwise. ... Several cultural events regarded as ‘the intellectual basis of Modernism’ took place in Europe prior to the rise of the movement, which did much to shape the modernist tendency by completely contradicting prior beliefs and concepts and introducing new interpretations of art, history and human experience. (Badawi 132-133)

M. M. Badawi in his book *A Short History of Modern Arabic Literature* states: “Arabic modernism is no longer the shocking phenomenon that it appeared to be in the 1950s and 1960s.”²⁷ In his book *A Critical Introduction to Modern Arabic Poetry* Badawi says: “One revealing feature of the New Poets is their very obsession with newness or

²⁷M. M. Badawi, *A Short History of Modern Arabic Literature* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1993) 86.

modernity. ...That modernity or newness (Al-Hadatha) has become a value in itself.”²⁸ Yet the Arabic term *Al-Hadathah* has been introduced as a translated term for both English terms ‘modernism’ and ‘modernity’, but this study sticks to the Arabic term *Al-Hadathah* for its appropriateness with the English term ‘modernism’ and also to avoid overlapped meanings of the two terms, i.e. ‘modernism’ and ‘modernity’.

Thus, building on the various attitudes of Arab critics towards the form and meaning of the Arabic word *Al-Hadathah* and its translation into English, this study prefers to use the Arabic word *Al-Hadathah* to mean ‘modernism’.

2.2. The Prevailing Themes of Modernist Poetry

2.2.1. Theme of Alienation

Alienation is essentially a humanistic phenomenon that does not concern a specific generation or era. It is a psychological and epistemological malaise that pertains to the human. It is prevalent among all generations and all epochs. According to the *Cambridge Advanced Learner's Dictionary*, alienation means ‘the feeling that you have no connection with the people around you’. Linguistically, alienation is synonymous with other words such as estrangement, disaffection, withdrawal, isolation, and separation. In terms of psychoanalysis, alienation is a psychosocial case that thoroughly dominates the individual and makes him/her either alienated from him or disconnected from people around him/her and consequently makes him stay far from his social reality.

There are many reasons are behind the alienation in modern society. Some writers say that alienation betides as a result of the conflict between the human and the

²⁸M. M. Badawi, *A Critical Introduction to Modern Arabic Poetry* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1975) 258-259.

dimensions of his existence. There are three dimensions to determine this: the first is credited as a concrete dimension in which the conflict between economics, social, and political powers lead to alienation. The second is a principled dimension where the poet searches for the ideal world, because the world in which he/she lives smashes his human personality. The third is metaphysical dimension where the poet goes beyond the physical world to get the truth of his existence. From a religious aspect, individual assailed by alienation due to his separation from the belief of Allah [God]. From philosophic aspect, alienation is a reaction to the collapse of the organic relationship between the human being and existential experience: self/object, part/whole/ person/society, present/future. For Marx, the social conditions evoke feelings of alienation and capitalist societies are the culprit of this demon. Hegel argues that subjectivity, individuality, and freedom develop through a process in which self is alienated from itself and then comes to recognise itself in its alienation. While Marx argues that alienation is a systematic result of capitalism. He states that a worker in the capitalist regimes is afflicted by alienation because he/she works for others and not for him/herself.

Other writers say that the reason of alienation is the inflation of the communities which in turn led to conversion of the social relationship into official relationship. But the poets possess their own reasons as well as the above mentioned reasons. When the modernist poet finds her/himself unable to achieve her/his aim in life, she/he becomes alienated from the society or from the self. Feelings of alienation make the poet unable to change his social situation where he/she lives in. Some modernist poets find themselves chained to the norm of the society and cannot go beyond conventions, therefore they feel alienated from their society.

Alienation in this study will be dealt with from a literary perspective through analyzing the Arabic and English texts. The theme of alienation is pervasive in Arabic poetry since the pre-Islamic period, Zuhair Ibn Abi Sulma says:

سَمْتُ تَكَالِيفَ الْحَيَاةِ ، وَمَنْ يَعْشُ ثَمَانِينَ حَوْلًا لَا أَبَا لَكَ ، يَسَامُ

“I got bored of life’s burden; and he who lives eighty years (no doubt),
will grow weary.”²⁹

Arab poets were afflicted by the intellectual alienation which made them isolated from society. Abu al-Alaa Al-Maarri suffered self-imposed staying in his house for forty years and was consequently nicknamed ‘the double prisoner’ for he was blind too. In the following lines Al-Maarri states that he is a triple prisoner:

أُرَانِي فِي الثَّلَاثَةِ مِنْ سَجُونِي

فَلَا تَسْأَلْ عَنِ الْخَبَرِ النَّبِيْثِ

لَفَقْدِي نَاطِرِي وَلَزُومِ بَيْتِي

وَكُونِ النَّفْسِ فِي الْجِسْمِ الْخَبِيْثِ

Methinks, I am thrice imprisoned-ask not me

Of news that need no telling-

By loss of sight, confinement to my house,

And this vile body for my spirit’s dwelling.³⁰

Al-Maarri’s feeling of alienation from the society led him to regard his birth as a sin committed by his father. For this reason, he never married and requested that after his death, his motto should be inscribed on his grave:

²⁹This verse quoted from Zuhair’s poem (Muallaqah), my translation.

³⁰The Arabic lines taken from Al-Marri’s collection *Luzumiyyat*, and the translation of these verses into English taken from Reynold A. Nicholson in his book *A Literary History of The Arabs*, (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1969) 315.

هذا جناه أبي علي وما جنيت علي أحد

This wrong was by my father done

To me, but ne'er by me to one. (Nicholson 317)

Al-Maarri's alienation is an intellectual one due to his scholarship in philosophy. He is called the "philosopher of poets and the poet of philosophers". He used to forsake the people to live in seclusion from his society. His self and societal alienations are part of his intellectual alienation. Among his controversial thoughts is his rejection of religions. Being amidst religious environment, Al-Maarri's controversial thoughts seem to be abnormal. He criticized religions viewing them as mere superstitions. In the following lines, he scoffs at religions and religious people including Islam:

هفت الحنيفة والنصارى ما هتدت ويهود حارت والمجوس مضللة

اثنان أهل الأرض : ذو عقل بلا دين وآخر دين لا عقل له

(Hanifs)³¹ are stumbling, Christians all astray,

Jews wildered, Magians far on error's way.

We mortals are composed of two great schools-

Enlightened knaves or else religious fools.³² (Nicholson 318)

The theme of alienation in Arabic modernist poetry can be traced not only through the aspects of alienation which are realized throughout the expressions of anxiety, depression, sorrow and loneliness, but also through tracing the socio-political life of the poets. Many Arab modernist poets were compelled to leave their homelands out of

³¹The researcher replaced the translator's word (*Hanafis*) by the word *Hanifs*. *Hanafis* means the followers of the Imam Abu Hanifah (699-765) and the followers of his Madhab (school) in the present day, but *Hanif*, plural *Hunafa*, is an Arabic word used synonymously with the word Muslim, and *Haniffiya* is used as a synonym for Islam. Al-Maarri in this verse refers to Muslims in general, not only to the *Hanafis*

³²Reynold A. Nicholson, *A Literary History of The Arabs* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1969).

fear of persecution and imprisonment. Badr Shakir Al-Sayyab is not the only modernist poet who was compelled to escape from his country, but many other poets either left their homeland willingly such as the Iraqi poet, Nazik al-Malaika, who died in Cairo, the Syrian poet, Nizar Qabbani, who lived in Lebanon and died in London, or unwillingly, such as the Iraqi poet, Abd al-Wahhab Al-Bayati, who spent his life in exile and eventually died in Syria and the Syrian poet, Adonis, who settled in Lebanon after his imprisonment in Syria for his political views, and the Palestinian poets who were forced to live in exile like millions of Palestinian citizens who found themselves homeless. The political alienation is an important part in the life of Arab poets. In his poem “Min Manfa ila Manfa” [From Exile to Exil], the Yemeni poet Abdullah Al-Baraduni says:

بلادي من يدي طاغ

إلى أطفى إلى أطفى

ومن سجن إلى سجن

ومن منفى إلى منفى

و من مستعمر باد

إلى مستعمر أخفى

.....

بلادي في ديار الغير

أو في دارها لهفى

وحتى في أراضيتها

تقاسي غربة المنفى

My country is handed over from one tyrant
to the next, a worse tyrant;

from one prison to another,
 from one exile to another.
 It is colonized by the observed
 invader and the hidden one ;

 My country grieves
 in its own boundaries
 and in other people's land
 and even on its own soil
 suffers the alienation of exile.³³

In his poem "Limatha Nahnu fi Al-Manfa" [Why We Are In Exile] Abd al-Wahab al-Bayati says:

لماذا نحن في المنفى
 نموت
 نموت في صمت

Why do we die in exile
 Unmourned by anybody³⁴

Similarly, the Palestinian poet Jabra Ibrahim Jabra, in his poem "Bawadi Al-Nafi" [Deserts of Exile] considers his exile as a life in a horrible desert:

في بوادي النفي ربيعا تلو ربيع
 ما الذي نحن فاعلون بحبنا
 وملء عيوننا تراب وصقيع

³³Translated from the Arabic by Diana Der-Hovanessian and Sharif S. Elmusa.

³⁴Khalid A. Sulaiman, *Palestine and Modern Arab Poetry* (London: Zed Books Ltd, 1984) 118.

In the desert of exile, spring after
Spring passes.

What are we doing with our love

While our eyes are full of dust and rime³⁵

Badr Shakir Al-Sayyab experienced societal, emotional, political, geographical and spiritual alienation.³⁶ Al-Sayyab's life was brimming with agony and bitterness since his childhood when he lost his mother at an early age, then his grandmother. In his poem "Fi Layali Al-Kharif" [In the Autumn Nights] Al-Sayyab repines:

في ليالي الخريف الحزين ،

حين يطغى علي الحنين

كالضباب الثقيل

في زوايا الطريق الطويل ؛

.....

في ليالي الخريف الطوال ؛

آه لو تعلمين

كيف يطغى علي الأسى والملال !

In the nights of the somber autumn,

When the longing shrouds me

Like the heavy fog

In the nooks of the long road

.....

In the long nights of autumn,

³⁵Ibid, 119.

³⁶Mohammed Radhi Jafar, *Alienation in Contemporary Iraqi Poetry (Phase of Pioneers)* (NP: Arab Writers Union, 1999).

Ah! If you know

How the grief and ennui overcome me!³⁷

In his poem “Ahlam al-Fares Al-Qadeem” [Dreams of the Ancient Knight] Abd al-Sabur expresses his alienation from humanity and wishes to be a bough of tree or a wing of seagull:

لو أننا كنا كغصني شجرة

الشمس أرضعت عروقنا معا

والفجر روانا ندئ معا

.....

لو أننا كنا جناحي نورس رقيق

وناعم ، لا يبرح المضيق

معلق على ذؤابات السفن

If only we were the two boughs of a tree

The sun would nourish our roots together

.....

If only we were the wings of a gentle, tender

Seagull, never leaving the strait

Hovering over the ship's wake³⁸

Abd al-Sabur complains all the time in the morning and in the evening. In his poem

“Aud ila ma Jara thaka al-Masa” [Going Back to that Evening] he says:

في ذلك المساء

كنت حزينا مرهقا في ذلك المساء

³⁷My translation.

³⁸Mounah A. Khouri and Hamid Algar, ed and trans, *An Anthology of Modern Arabic Poetry* (California: California UP, 1974) 143-145.

لعلكم لا تعرفون الحزن يا سادتي الفرسان

(وان عرفتموه ، فهو ليس حزني)

حزني لا تطفئه الخمر ولا المياه

حزني لا تطرده الصلاة

قافلة موسوقة بالموت في الغرار ،

والأشباح في الجرار ، الندم

That evening I was sad

And was tired, that evening;

Perhaps you do not know

What sorrow means, my knightly lords. (It is not, whatever it is,

Your kind of sadness)

Mine is a sorrow that can't be Quenched with wine or water

Nor can it be dispelled by prayer,

It is a death-bound caravan

Moving in deserts wide,

Ghost-driven in lands wild,

Dogged by regret³⁹.

For the West, alienation was an old malady which did not merely belong to modern societies. Alienation is one among the characteristics of Eliot's modernism. The anthropologist, Eric Robert Wolf, in his book *Inwardness and Morality* says:

Alienation is a major literary theme of the past century and a half. In T. S.

Eliot's early poems, for instance, alienation often takes the form of disgust

³⁹Translated by M. M. Enani. 27/08/2010 4: 58 <<http://www.arabicnadwah.com/arabicpoetry/sabour.htm>>.

for the world, for the people, and for oneself as a physical being. The characteristic ambiance is the empty, dirty, trashy, sawdusty city street at night, under insidious fog, smoke, rain. People live in rented rooms and one-night cheap hotels. Bed is neither rest nor refuge. Favorite adjectives for the world, the body, and the soul are “grimy”, “dingy”, “soiled”. Odors of tobacco and stale beer pervade. (Wolf 14)

Though alienation seems an old theme, it is still one of the principal themes in modernist poetry. The theme of alienation in Eliot’s poetry is reflected clearly in his early poems and especially in “The Waste Land”. In his poem “The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock” the persona’s monologue reveals alienation and weariness of the speaker:

I have measured out my life with coffee spoons.

.....

Shall I say, I have gone at dusk through narrow streets

And watched the smoke that rises from the pipes

Of lonely men in shirt-sleeves, leaning out of windows?... (51, 70-72)

In Eliot’s “The Waste Land”, the contradicting picture of ‘April is the cruelest month’ and the negative image of the city, display the poet’s alienation from modern life.

2.2.2. Theme of City

City is that urban place which varied assemblage of people who live together to make that area a center of power, trade, politics and culture. It was established to be a peaceful settlement where people can live in peace and comfort. The theme of the city is a vast subject, but this study will deal with the theme of the city from a modernist poetic perspective. In other words, this study will try to explore the city as portrayed by the

modernist poets. Theme of the city occupies a sublime space in the world literatures throughout history. For the ancient Arabic poetry, the Pre-Islamic poets did not deal with the theme of city because there were no cities to be eulogized or to be censured. After the emergence of Islam, many cities were founded, especially during the Umayyad and Abbasid dynasties. In the Abbasid period, the poets celebrate the city and lament the fall and the ruin of the city by the invaders. On the contrary, some Arab poets, especially Bedouins, abhor and reject the city. Maisuna⁴⁰ is a specimen of such poets who reject the city and prefer the desert life:

The russet suit of camel's hair,
 With spirits light and eye serene,
 Is dearer to my bosom far
 Than all the trappings of a queen.
 The humble tent and murmuring breeze
 That whistles thro' its fluttering walls,
 My unaspiring fancy please,
 Better than towers and splendid halls⁴¹

The poet's negative attitude towards the city is a modern motif among the Arab romantic and modernist poets. The attitude of the Arab modernist poets towards the city can be classified into three trends; the first trend advocates the absolute rejection of the city, and the best representatives of this trend are Ahmed Abd al-Muti Hijazi, Adonis, Abd al-Wahhab Al-Bayati, and Badr Shaker Al-Sayyab. The second trend holds

⁴⁰Maisuna Al-Kalbi was a Bedouin wife of the Caliph Muawiyah Ibn Abu Sufyan (602-680), divorced due to her verses in which she mocked her husband Muawiyah.

⁴¹J. D. Carlyle, *Specimens of Arabian Poetry from The Earliest Time to The Extinction of The Khaliphah* (Cambridge UP, 1796) 31.

antithetical views of the city. The poets of this trend oscillate between admiration and rejection of the city, among these poets are Nizar Qabbani and Salah Abd al-Sabur. The third trend celebrates the city. Among the poets of this trend are Mahmud Darwish and Dr. Abdul Aziz Al-Maqaleh, who always extols his city Sana'a. In his collection *Kitab Al-Mudon: Jidariyyat Ghinaiyyah min Zaman al-Ishq wa Al-Safar* [The Book of Cities: Walls Lyrics from the time of Love and Travel] Al-Maqaleh eulogizes all the cities which he has visited, among them six are Western cities and fifteen are Arab cities including his beloved city, Sana'a. In the following verses, Al-Maqaleh verbalizes his great love to Sana'a:

صنعاء
 سيدتي وملاكي الطهور
 وحارستي
 سامحيني إذا كان قلبي
 أشرك غيرك
 في حبه
 وتواطأ في لحظات
 من العمر
 مع فائنات من الشرق والغرب
 مع سيدات من الوطن العربي
 فقد كنت أول حب له

Sana'a

Oh my lady, my purified angel,

And my guardian

Forgive me if my heart
 Shared others with you in love
 And for moments in life colluded
 With femme fatales from the east and the west
 With ladies from the Arab world
 You were the first beloved⁴².

To the contrary, Abd al-Wahab Al-Bayati portrays the city as a villain, unreal, false, naked, and full of blood and crimes. Amongst the Arab modernist poets, it is Al-Bayati who censures the city severely. In his poem "Al-Madina" [The City] Al-Bayati exposes the city as a place of crime, killing, torturing, loss, persecution, degradation, decay and poverty:

وعندما تعرت المدينة
 رأيت في عيونها الحزينة:
 مياذل الساسة واللصوص والبيادق
 رأيت في عيونها : المشانق
 تُنصب السجون والمحارق

 رأيت: الدم والجريمة

When the city uncovered
 I saw in its sad eyes:
 Slippers of the rulers, thieves and pawns
 In its eyes, I saw: the gallows
 The jails and the crematoriums are erected

⁴²My translation.

.....
 I saw the blood and the crime⁴³.

In his fragment “The City”, Adonis says:

Our fire is advancing towards the city

To demolish the bed of the city.

We shall demolish the bed of the city. (Boullata 63)

As much as he hates the city, Al-Sayyab loves the country, especially his village, Jaikur. For Al-Sayyab, Jaikur represents the ideal world. Several of his poems bear the name of Jaikur such as “Marthiyat Jaikur” [Elegy on Jaikur], “Al-Awdah li Jaikur” [The Return to Jaikur], “Afya Jaikur” [Shadows of Jaikur], “Jaikur wa Al-Madinah” [Jaikur and the City], “Tammuz Jaikur” [Tammuz of Jaikur], “Jaikur Shabat” [Jaikur become old], “Jaikur wa Ashjar Al-Madina” [Jaikur and Trees of the City], “Jaikur Ummi” [Jaikur is my Mother]. In his poem “Jaikur wa Al-Madinah” [Jaikur and the City] Al-Sayyab portrays his life in the city as a nightmare where the streets become ropes of mud that masticate his heart:

و تلتفت حولي دروب المدينة:

حبالا من الطين يمضغن قلبي

و يعطين ، عن جمرة فيه ، طينة ،

حبالا من النار يجلدن عري الحقول الحزينة

و يحرقن جيکور في قاع روعي

و يزرعن فيها رماد الضغينة.

The city streets coil around me:

Thongs of mud bite into my heart,

⁴³These lines are taken from Al-Bayati's collection *Yawmiyyat Siyasi Muhtarif*, 1970, my translation.

A dull ember in it yields only clay,
 Cords of fire lash naked melancholy fields,
 They, burn Jaikur in the pit of my soul,
 They plant in the pit ashes of rancor.⁴⁴

In the following lines taken from his poem “Ughniyah Lil Qahirah” [A Song to Cairo] Abd al-Sabur declares his love for the city in spite of all its tribulations and all its defects:

أهواك يا مدينتي
 أهواك رغم أنني أنكرت في رحابك
 وأن طيري الأليف طار عني
 وأنني أعود ، لا مأوى ، ولا ملجأ
 أعود كي أشرد في أبوابك
 أعود كي أشرب من عذابك . . .

I love oh my city . . .
 I love you, though I have been denied in your spaciousness
 And my tame bird fled from me
 And I return, neither shelter nor refuge
 I return to be displaced at your doors
 I return to drink your torture⁴⁵ . . .

In the ancient Western communities, the city represents a perfect area for a perfect community⁴⁶. It had a religious dimension and was connected to God and Heaven.

⁴⁴Salma Khadra Jayyusi, ed, *Modern Arabic Poetry: An Anthology* (New York: Columbia UP, 1987) 432, translated by Lena Jayyusi and Christopher Middleton.

⁴⁵My translation.

⁴⁶Hugh Magennis, *Images of Community in Old English Poetry* (Cambridge UP, 1996).

Gradually, the concept of the city changed from a celestial signification to an earthly concept to become eventually connected to human and community rather than God and Heaven. S. T. Augustine (354-430) wrote a book entitled *The City of God* in which he indicated the conflict between the city of God and the city of humans. Other writers dealt with the imaginary cities and the perfect communities as in Plato's Ideal City, in his utopian work *Republic*, Thomas More's *Utopia* (1516) and Tommaso Campanella's *The City of the Sun* (1602). All these works are utopian philosophies dealing with the city as a place of ideal society.

For the English romantic poets, some of them present a positive image of the city, whereas others point out the problematics of the city. For instance in Wordsworth's "Composed upon Westminster Bridge", Wordsworth depicts a splendid view of London:

This City now doth, like a garment, wear
The beauty of the morning; silent, bare,
Ships, towers, domes, theatres, and temples lie
Open unto the fields, and to the sky;
All bright and glittering in the smokeless air.
Never did sun more beautifully steep. (4-9)

And in his poem "On the Extinction of The Venetian Republic", Wordsworth glorifies the city of Venice:

Venice, the eldest Child of Liberty
She was a maiden City, bright and free
No guile seduced, no force could violate. (4-6)

Among the other romantic poets who view the city and its streets as a dingy and

deserted place are William Blake and Byron. Blake in his poem “London”, portrays the city as corrupted and cruel in which everything is confiscated, even the river. In the city, nobody can be free. Note the double use of the word ‘chartered’ which metaphorically emphasizes the taking over of the impossible, i.e. the river:

I wander through each chartered street,
Near where the chartered Thames does flow,
A mark in every face I meet,
Marks of weakness, marks of woe.
In every cry of every man. (1-5)

Blake and Wordsworth are romantic poets, but they present a contrasting picture of London city. On the other hand, Wordsworth also contradicted himself when he presents another image of London in his poem “The Prelude, Residence in London” where he criticized the crowd of London and its citizens:

To times when half the City shall break out
Full of one passion, vengeance, rage, or fear?
To executions, to a Street on fire,
Mobs, riots, or rejoicings? From these sights. (672- 675)

The Victorian poets, they held negative attitudes towards the city. For instance, the eminent Victorian poet, Mathew Arnold, in his poem “A Summer Night” presented the city in a melancholic image where the feelings of loneliness and alienation surround the individual in deserted streets:

In the deserted, moon-blanch'd street,
How lonely rings the echo of my feet!

Those windows which I gaze at, frown,
 Silent and white, unopening down. (1- 4)

The negative image of the city emerged in the works of some romantic poets including Wordsworth, who showed an ambivalent attitude to the city. The Victorian poets view the city as an indicator of inhumanity and anxiety because cities in the Victorian era were more complicated due to the social changes as people left the countryside to begin a new life in the industrial cities. The radical transformation from spiritualism to materialism as well as the emergence of the intellectual and scientific theories of Marx and Darwin made the Victorian poets inveigh against the city.

In the 20th century, the cities witnessed momentous changes and development. Meanwhile, they witnessed a savage destruction during the 1st and 2nd World War and also during the Cold War. The common image of London city shared by the romantic, Victorian and modernist poets is that it has always been depicted as a foggy, dim place crammed with people. The poets dealt with the theme of city since the ancient time; however, the theme of the city is being highly preferred by the modernist poets. They focused on the intangible side of the city and converted the real city to become a surreal city. For such poets, city is a manifestation of modernity and one of the significant factors which forms the personality of the modernist poets. Also, for the modernist poets, the city is a locus of alienation⁴⁷ rather than a place of comfort and harmony; an example of decay. According to Baudelaire, the city is a dead and disgusting world. It has a horrible face, which arouses worry, despair, alienation, and isolation. It is a city of vice and sin and a home of paradoxes, anarchy, ugliness and chaos. The city in T. S. Eliot's poetry is

⁴⁷Edward Timms and David Kelley, ed, *Unreal City: Urban Experience in Modern European Literature and Art* (Manchester: Manchester UP, 1985).

unreal, ghosts-ridden, shelter of death, and infertility. Like, Byron and Blake, Eliot depicts the city covered with fog and chimney smoke.

2.2.3. Theme of Death

Death was and still is an inescapable matter that perturbs poets and all humans in general. Since the earlier time, Arabic poetry had touched on the theme of death. Arab poets of pre-Islamic era had a pagan and materialistic vision of life and death, however most of them dealt with the inevitability of death. Kab Ibn Zuhair in his poem “Al-Burdah” [The Mantle] says:

كل ابن انثى وإن طالت سلامته
يوماً على آلة حدباء محمول

Every woman's son,
long safe,
will one day be carried off
on a curve-backed bier⁴⁸

Jahiliyya [Pre-Islamic] poets dealt with two kinds of death: the concrete and the abstract death. For the concrete death or the real death, *Jahiliyya* poets display two different attitudes towards it. The first attitude represented the existentialist trend of the poets who aspired to achieve and obtain all their pleasures before death coming. When the poets of this trend fear death, they in reality fear losing their pleasures. Among these poets is Tarafa Ibn al-Abd who says:

فَإِنْ كُنْتُ لَا تَسْطِيعُ دَفْعَ مَنِيِّي فَدَعْنِي أَبَادِرُهَا بِمَا مَلَكَتْ يَدِي
وَلَوْلَا ثَلَاثُ هُنَّ مِنْ عَيْشَةِ الْفَتَى وَجَدَكَ لَمْ أَحْفَلْ مَتَى قَامَ عُودِي
فَمِنْهُمْ سَبْقِي الْعَاذِلَاتِ بِشَرْبَةِ كُمَيْتٍ مَتَى مَا تُعَلَّ بِالْمَاءِ تُزِيدِ

⁴⁸“Banat Suad: Translation and Introduction”, Michael A. Sells and M. J. Sells, *Journals of Arabic Literature*, vol. 21, No. 2 (sep 1990) 140-154.

Canst thou make me immortal, O thou that blamest me so
 For haunting the battle and loving the pleasures that fly?
 If thou hast not the power to ward me from Death, let me go
 To meet him and scatter the wealth in my hand, ere I die.
 Save only for three things in which noble youth take delight,
 I care not how soon rises o'er me the coronach loud:
 Wine that foams when the water is poured on it, ruddy, not bright,
 Dark wine that I quaff stol'n away from the cavilling crowd⁴⁹

The second attitude represents the poets' eagerness towards death due to boredom and alienation that control their feelings. In the *Jahiliyya* period, poets meant abstract death as a death of dignity and honor for humanity. Unlike the *Jahiliyya* poets, Muslim poets viewed death as a next stage of life called *Barzakh* life, which precedes resurrection. Islam presents a positive outlook of death; and answers all the metaphysical questions of life after death. However, Muslim traditional poets display two different attitudes towards death. The first attitude is represented by Muslim religious poets who perpetually engross with Allah. Such poets are content with death whenever it comes because they believe that this worldly life was created to test human beings while the afterlife is the true life, that is a reward. The following verses represent this view:

ولست أبالي حين أقتل مسلماً على أي جنب كان في الله مصرعي
 وذلك في ذات الإله وإن يشأ يبارك على أوصال شلو ممزَّع

I care not to die as I am a Muslim,
 on which side my demise for Allah was.
 It is all for God who if He wishes,

⁴⁹Reynold A. Nicholson, *A Literary History of The Arabs* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1969) 108.

He will bless these lacerated remains of limbs⁵⁰

The second attitude is the attitude of the licentious poets like Abu Nuwas and Abu al-Atahiya. Abu Nuwas, before his death, wrote ascetic poems which display his fear of death because of the sins which he has perpetrated. Such poets fear about the future after death; therefore their ascetic poems deal with death, grave and Judgment. For instance, Abu Nuwas says:

يا ليت شعري كيف أنت على	ظهر السرير وأنت لا تدري
أو ليت شعري كيف أنت إذا	غسلت بالكافور والسدر
أو ليت شعري كيف أنت إذا	وضع الحساب صبيحة الحشر
ما حجتني فيما أتيت وما	قولي لربي بل وما عذري
أن لا اكون قصدت رشدي أو	أقبلت ما استدبرت من أمري
يا سواتنا مما اكتسبت ويا	أسفي على ما فات من عمري

O would that I knew how you will fare
 Unwitting upon your bed;
 Or that I knew how you will fare
 When [your body] is bathed in camphor and lotus blossom;
 Or that I knew how you will fare
 When account is made on the Morning of Assembly
 What will be my defense about the things I have done?
 What will I say to my Lord? What excuse will mine be –
 For not having sought out a path of righteousness,
 Or embracing the [good] I turned my back on?

⁵⁰My translation, these verses are attributed to Khubayb Ibn Adiy, a companion of the prophet Mohammed, he recited these verses before a moments of his killing and crucifying.

O for the misery of my returns –

And the pity of what was missed of my life! (Kennedy 122)

Arabic modernist poetry is imbued with the theme of death. The Tammuzian poets⁵¹ (Al-Sayyab, Al-Bayati, Hawi, and Adonis) view death in a different perspective. They view death as a path for a better life; significantly, they indicate struggle, revolution and victory by employing myths about death and rebirth. Like Tammuzian poets, the Palestinian poet, Mahmoud Darwish extols death because it is the way of regaining his occupied land. In his book *The Myth in Al-Sayyab's Poetry* Ali Abd al-Ridha says that it is rare to find an Arab poet like Al-Sayyab who could perceive that death lies in life and life lies in death. He adds that rhythm of death permeates in Al-Sayyab's poems that make him sound as if he is a ghost of death⁵². The words and images of death prevail in Abd al-Sabur's poems such as corpses, bury, limbs, blood, ruin, obituary, destruction, mourning, shrouds, coffin and crucifixion. In his poem "Al-Nas Fi Biladi" [The People of my Country] Abd al-Sabur expresses the ordinary ceremony of his uncle's death:

Yesterday I visited my village

Uncle Mustafa had died

They laid him to rest in the earth

He built no castles (his hut was of mud)

And behind his ancient coffin

Walked those who, like him, owned only an old cotton gown.⁵³

⁵¹The name of 'Tammuzian poets' is given by Jabra Ibrahim Jabra (1919-1994) to the modern Arab poets who used the myth of Tammuz in their poem.

⁵²Ali Abdalridha, *Al-Usturah Fi Shir Al-Sayyab* [The Myth in Al-Sayyab's Poetry] (Iraq, Ministry of Culture and Arts, 1978) 170.

⁵³Salma Khadra Jayyusi, ed, *Modern Arabic Poetry: An Anthology* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1987) 124.

For the Western poets, death was and still is a complicated matter. The theme of death is present since the early modern poetry.⁵⁴ Critics say that the obsessive concern with the mortality of human being caused states of anxiety and alienation to the modernist poets, and their excessive contemplation of death led to a negative meaning of life and personal identity. The attitudes of the modernist poets towards the matter of death differ from one poet to another. For some, it is a dreadful ghost and in the eyes of other poets, it is savior, a gift of God and the greatest blessing to human beings. The twentieth century is described as the century of genocides because of wars. Modernist poets dealt with both concrete and abstract death because the death of values and principles is equivalent to the death of human himself. As the contemplation of death was the major inclination of the modernist poets, the word 'death' and the words that relate to 'death' are excessively used in modernist poetry.

T. S. Eliot dealt with death as fate. Eliot's verses feature many words and phrases that refer to death, such as death skull, skeleton, breastless creatures underground, lipless grin, and dead limbs. His poem, "The Waste Land" dealt with the theme of death excessively, starting from its title 'The Waste Land' which refers to the death of land and death of its inhabitants. It may either symbolize the death of moral standards, love, peace and freedom in the modern era and also refer to the real death of people due to the world wars and the colonization movements. Its subtitles 'The Burial of The Dead' in the first section and 'Death by Water' in the fourth section, clearly refer to the subject of death.

⁵⁴Lucinda M Backer, *Death and Early Modern Englishwoman* (Hampshire: Ashgate, 2003) 16.

2.3. Techniques of Modernist Poetry

2.3.1. Language Techniques

W. H. Auden says “a poet is, before anything else, a person who is passionately in love with language.”⁵⁵ The modern poetry in the first half of the 20th century was written in a new poetic diction and has been glossed as ‘modernist poetry’ or ‘modernism’. Nevertheless, modernism has a vast significance in literary criticism and does not merely concern poetry, but also other fields of art, literature, music and architecture. The modernist poets prefer everyday language instead of the standard literary language. In his essay “The Function of Poetry” T. S. Eliot says “Emotion and feeling, then are best expressed in the common language of the people—that is, in the language common to all classes: the structure, the rhythm, the sound, the idiom of a language, express the personality of the people which speaks it.” On the contrary, the modernist poet does not confine himself to a specific diction of the language. He/She may utilize the colloquial language such as E. E. Cummings and William Carlos Williams or ordinary language such as Ezra Pound and T. S. Eliot, who says in his poem “The Waste Land”:

At the violet hour, the evening hour that strives
Homeward, and brings the sailor home from sea,
The typist home at teatime, clears her breakfast, lights
Her stove, and lays out food in tins.
Out of the window perilously spread
Her drying combinations touched by the sun's last rays,
On the divan are piled (at night her bed)

⁵⁵Kevin Goldstein-Jackson, comp, *The Dictionary of Essential Quotations* (London: Croom Helm, 1983) 122.

Stockings, slippers, camisoles, and stays. (220-227)

In these lines, Eliot uses the everyday language⁵⁶ such as typist, tea, breakfast, stove, food in tins, drying combination, stockings, slippers, and camisoles. Like Eliot, Abd al-Sabur employs the everyday language as in his poem “Al-Huzn” [The Sorrow]:

يا صاحبي ، إني حزين
 طلع الصباح ، فما ابتسمت ، ولم ينر وجهي الصباح
 وخرجت من جوف المدينة أطلب الرزق المتاح

 ورجعت بعد الظهر في جيبتي قروش
 فشربت شايًا في الطريق
 ورتقت نعلي

Oh, friend, I am sad

Morning has risen, but I smiled not, and morning lit my face not

And I left the city searching for a daily bread

.....
 And afternoon I returned with money in my pocket

In the way, I had a tea

And I mended my shoes.⁵⁷

The language of the modernist poem is at once familiar and common, but complex and difficult. The modernist poets focus on the choice of words significantly in their poems. The modernist poets play with the words to produce a fragmented text. They juxtapose the words and phrase to make the reader assume the missed words in the

⁵⁶Salah Abd al-Sabur, *Hayati fi Al-Shi'r* [My Life in Poetry] (Beirut: Dar al-Awdah, 1977) 167.

⁵⁷My translation.

verses. For the modernist poet, word choice is the landmark of the successful poet because it is the key device to create allusions, images, myths, irony, symbols, paradoxes and metaphors. Although traditional poets employed such literary devices in their poetry, the modernist poets produced distinctive poetry which is different from the traditional one. The modernist poets used the technique of poet's self-concealment by superseding it by a persona; and dramatic monologue is pertinent in revealing the persona rather than the poet.

The poetic language in both Arabic and English modernist poetry highlights the word and its relationship to the things which it signifies. Neologisms and the lexical inventions are two of the main features of a modernist poem. A modernist poem is fragmented, based on images rather than words and appears to the reader as an abstruse text. "The reader of modernism had to learn to tolerate incomplete, unfinished, unconnected material, as the writer defined and created his or her own medium."⁵⁸ "Eliot's remarks that the poet must 'dislocate' language and must be 'difficult' were also highly influential. Science and ordinary language made statements directly; poetry, on the other hand, made them obliquely, through the use of metaphor, paradox, and irony."⁵⁹

i. Technique of Exotic Vocabulary, Phrases and Foreign Names

Utilizing an alien and archaic vocabulary of miscellaneous cultures in poetry is one of the features of modernist poetry. This technique commenced early in English poetry. Shakespeare used a number of foreign personalities and places in his works. And the English romantic poets also referred to the foreign places in their poems. A poet's

⁵⁸Randy Malamud, "The Language of Modernism", *South Atlantic Review*, vol. 56, No. 1, (Jan., 1991), pp. 134-136, *JSTOR*. 13/06/2008 07:42 <<http://www.jstor.org/stable/3200163>>.

⁵⁹Michael H Whitworth, ed, *Modernism* (Malden: Blackwell, 2007) 43.

wide breadth of knowledge and his over-familiarity with cultures enable him to deploy the primitive and exotic words in his poetry. For instance, Al-Sayyab in his poem “Min Ru'ya Fukai” [From Fukai’s Vision] composed the first line of the poem from Chinese language as it is shown in the following:

هياي .. كونغاي ، كونغاي !
 الصين حقل شاي ،
 وسوق شنغهاي
 يعج بالمزارعين قبل كل عيد.
 هياي .. كونغاي ، كونغاي !

Hiai ... Ko-ngai, Ko-ngai

China is a field of tea

And Shanghai market

Is teeming with farmer before every feast

*Hiai ... Ko-ngai, Ko-ngai.*⁶⁰

Al-Sayyab gathers plenty of foreign words, some of them are names of writers, myths and places such as William Sazac⁶¹, Robespierre, Krupp, Sappho, Shakespeare, Macbeth, Icarus, Narcissus, Tantalus, Medusa, Oedipus, Jocasta, Faust, Helen, Ulysses, Cerberus, Ganymede, Olympus, Aeneas, Eifel, Avon, king etc. Moreover, some poems of Al-Sayyab are entitled with foreign words such as “Cerberus in Babel”, “Garcia Lorca”, “Min Ru'ya Fukai” [From Fukai’s Vision], and “Louis MacNeice”.

Similarly, Abd al-Sabur deploys foreign words; he uses foreign transcription as in the poem, “Baudelaire”. Abd al-Sabur draws the last line of Baudelaire’s poem “Au

⁶⁰My translation.

⁶¹According to Al-Sayyab’s notes on his poem “Min Ru'ya Fukai” [From Fukai's Vision] William Sazac was a doctor at the Red Cross Hospital in Hiroshima.

Lecteur” [To The Reader]:

يا صديقي أنا

Hypocrite lecteur

mon semblable, mon frère!

شاعر أنت والكون نثر

Like Al-Sayyab, Abd al-Sabur utilizes the foreign names in his poems such as William Butler Yeats, Yevtushenko, and Volga. Eliot employs foreign words and phrases from other languages such as Sanskrit, French, Greek and Italian. In his poem “Rhapsody on a Windy Night”, the line 51 has been loaned from French language:

La lune ne garde aucune rancune. (51)

The above line is drawn from a poem by the French symbolist poet Jules Laforgue (1860- 1887) entitled “The Lament of that Beautiful Moon.”⁶² Eliot’s collection *Prufrock and Other Observation* contains a poem with an Italian title *La Figlia che Piange*. In Eliot’s “Sweeney Erect”, he noted *Nausicaa and Polypheme*:

Morning stirs the feet and hands

(Nausicaa and Polypheme).

Gesture of orang-outang. (9-11)

These two mythological characters which are mentioned parenthetically refer to the Greek epic *Odyssey* written by Homer.⁶³ The concern of this study is to point out that a modernist poet employs words and phrases from other languages which differ from his language. In Eliot’s “Mr. Eliot’s Sunday Morning Service”, he noted this Greek text:

Superfotation of : τ δ ε ν. (6)

⁶²Richard Danson Brown and Suman Gupta, ed, *Aestheticism and Modernism: Debating 20th Century Literature 1900- 1960* (London: Routledge, 2005) 259.

⁶³James Edwin Miller, *T. S. Eliot The Making of an American Poet* (Pennsylvania: Pennsylvania UP, 2005).

Peter Childs in his book *Modernism*, says “Eliot borrowed from Baudelaire, mythology, Shakespeare, Eastern religion, paganism, music hall and a host of literary predecessors”.⁶⁴ Such use of foreign words and phrases is considered one of the new techniques of the modernist poetry.

ii. Technique of Repetition

Repetition in poetry comprises repetition of the letter, word, phrase and the lines or paragraph. Repetition is a poetic device in both conventional and modernist poetry. Nazik Al-Malaika, in her book *Qadhaya Al-Shir Al-Muasir* [Issues of the Contemporary Poetry], states that repetition in poetry was known in Arabic traditional poetry since the pre-Islamic period, but repetition became more familiar in the modern Arabic poetry. Repetition adds not only a rhythm, but also a psychological dimension to the poem. According to Nazik Al-Malaika, repetition of a letter is utilized much in modern Arabic poetry. Al-Sayyab employs all kinds of repetition in his poetry. In his poem “Unshudat Al-Matar” [Rain Song], Al-Sayyab utilizes the repetition of the letter, word, phrase and paragraph. The instance of the paragraph repetition is discernible in the following lines:

I cry to the Gulf, “O Gulf,
O giver of pearls, shells and death.”
The echo comes back
Like sobs,
“O Gulf,
O giver of shells and death”.
.....

⁶⁴Peter Childs, *Modernism: The New Critical Idiom* (London: Routledge, 2000) 99.

I cry to the Gulf, "O Gulf,
 O giver of pearls, shells and death".
 The echo comes back
 Like sobs,
 "O Gulf,
 O giver of shells and death." (Boullata 8-9)

Similarly, Abd al-Sabur employs the technique of repetition. In his poem "Ughniyah Lil Shitaa" [A Song to Winter], Abd al-Sabur repeats the words of winter, die, evening, alone, and he repeats some phrases such as "tells me", "I shall die alone" :

The winter tells me I shall die alone
 One winter just like this, one winter
 The evening tells me I shall die alone
 One evening just like this, one evening
 That my past years were all in vain
 That I live in a naked world.
 The winter tells me that my soul
 Shivers with the cold.

 The winter tells me that my body is sick
 The winter tells me
 That one winter just like this
 I will die alone
 Die alone

One winter. (Jayyusi 125- 126)

iii. Nagging and Resentful Language

The language of the modernist poet is a language of resentment and complaint because most of the modernist poets were alienated and were obsessed with death. Therefore, modernist poetry has a critical tone and displays a complaint about sorrow, urban decay and boredom. Several of Al-Sayyab's poems bear titles that imply unpleasant feeling such as "Ri'ah Tatamazaq" [A Lung is Lacerating], "Malal" [Weariness], "Madinah Bila Matar" [A City without Rain], "Madinat Al-Sarab" [City of The Mirage], "Gharib Ala Al-Khalij" [A Stranger by the Gulf], "Risalah min Maqbarah" [A Message from Graveyard], and "Ya Ghurbat Al-Ruh" [O Alienation of the Soul]. In his poem Jaikur and the City, Al-Sayyab says:

The city streets coil around me:
Thongs of mud bite into my heart,
A dull ember in it yields only clay,
Cords of fire lash naked melancholy fields,
They burn Jaikur in the pit of my soul,
They plant in the pit ashes of rancor. (Jayyusi 432)

In his poem "City of Sindbad" Al-Sayyab says:

Hungry in the tomb without food,
Naked in the snow without a cloak,
I cried out in winter:
Bestir, O rain
The beds of bones and snow and particles of dust,

The beds of stone. (Khouri 93)

Similarly, Abd al-Sabur, who is also called ‘the sad poet’, in his poem “Al-Huzn” [The Sorrow] complains about his sadness:

يا صاحبي ، إني حزين

طلع الصباح ، فما ابتسمت ، ولم ينر وجهي الصباح

Oh, friend, I am sad

Morning has risen, but I smiled not, and morning lit my face not.⁶⁵

In his poem “The people of My Country” Abd al-Sabur says:

The people of my country wound like falcons

Their songs are like the chill of winter in the rain's locks

Their laughter hisses like flame through firewood

Their footsteps dent the firm earth

They kill, steal, drink belch. (Jayyusi 123)

iv. Technique of Conversational Language

Using conversational language in Arabic poetry began with the birth of Arabic poetry itself. The conversational style whether it is dialogue or monologue was used in Arabic traditional poetry. For example, the pre-Islamic poet, Imru al-Qays begins his famous poem *Muallaq* with a dialogue when he says:

قفنا نبك من ذكرى حبيب ومنزل بسقط اللوى بين الدخول فحومل

Let's halt ! And on the' abode of loved ones weep

Where 'tween' “Dukhool” and “Hawmal” sands pile deep.⁶⁶

⁶⁵My translation.

⁶⁶Translated by Dr. Ibrahim A. Mumayiz, 28/08/ 2010

<<http://www.tatweer.edu.sa/En/EMagazine/Pages/Mu%E2%80%99allaqatImru%E2%80%99ulQays.aspx>>.

In the above-lines, there is an external dialogue between the poet and two others, either illusory or real. In Arabic traditional poetry, the dialogue occurs either between the poet and him/herself and in this case it is called internal (monologue) or between the poet and his companion, his beloved, nature, horse etc. In his poem *Muallaqa*, Antara Ibn Shaddad addresses his beloved in dramatic monologue:

يَا دَارَ عَبْلَةَ بِالْجَوَاءِ تَكَلِّمِي وَعَمِّي صَبَاحاً دَارَ عَبْلَةَ وَسَلِّمِي

.....

وَلَقَدْ ذَكَرْتُكَ وَالرِّمَاحُ نَوَاهِلُ مِنِّي وَبِضْ أَلْهَدِ تَقَطَّرُ مِنْ دَمِي

فَوَدِدْتُ تَقْبِيلَ السُّيُوفِ لِأَنَّهَا لَمَعَتْ كَبَارِقِ ثَغْرِكَ الْمُتَبَسِّمِ

O Ablah's dwelling in *Jawa*, do speak to me;

may your mornings be blessed,

and may you be protected from harm

.....

I remembered you when spears dipped into my body,

drinking deep; sharp, flashing swords dripping with my blood

How I desired then to kiss the swords,

because they sparkled like your smiling mouth.⁶⁷

Compared to Arabic traditional poetry, Arab modernist poets effectively deploy the techniques of monologue and dialogue; especially interior monologue which is considered a sort of stream of consciousness. Al-Sayyab is the first Arab modernist poet who uses the dramatic monologue technique in his poetry. In his poem "Al-Nahr wa Al-Mawt" [The River and Death] Al-Sayyab addresses a small river in Al-Basra city called Buwayb:

⁶⁷Translated by Mahmoud Abbas Masoud, <<http://www.saolt.net/forums/showthread.php?t=6670>>.

“Buwayb ah Buwayb”

.....

Are you a river or a forest of tears ?

.....

And you Buwayb . . .

I want to drown in you, gathering shells ,

building a house with them, where the overflow

from stars and moon.⁶⁸

The following lines, which are drawn from Abd al-Sabur’s poem “Ughniyat Al-Lail” [Night Song] demonstrates another example of the use of monologue:

"في الساعة الليلية الأخيرة"

"خذني إلى البيت ، فإني أخاف أن يبلى الندى"

"تذوب أصباغي"

"ويبدو قبح وجهي"

“In the late- night hour”

“Take me home, I fear that dew moistens me”

“And the make-up melts

Then my face looks ugly”⁶⁹

In Abd al-Sabur’s poem “Hadith fi Mqha” [Talk in a Café], the dialogue is incomplete, the poet leaves blank lines in the conversation as it is shown in the following lines:

هل فاجأتك بحديتي ؟

⁶⁸Translated by Lena Jayyusi and Christopher Middleton, Salma Khadra Jayyusi, ed, *Modern Arabic Poetry: An Anthology* (New York: Columbia UP, 1987) 435-436.

⁶⁹My translation.

.....
 إِنْصَاتَكَ كَانَ كَرِيماً مِنْكَ ؟

.....
 لَكِنِّي لَسْتُ غَرِيباً عَنْكَ

لَسْتُ غَرِيباً عَنْكَ

Did I surprise you with my talk?

.....
 Your listening was generous of you

.....
 But I am not a stranger to you

I am not stranger to you.⁷⁰

In his book *Dramatic Monologue*, Glennis Byron explores that dramatic monologue was highly employed in Victorian poetry. however, dramatic monologue is regarded as one of the devices of the modernist poem. The conversational technique is employed in many Eliot's poems.

v. Techniques of Paradox and Juxtaposition

Paradox as a poetic device was not only employed by the modernist poets, but also by the traditional poets. The pre-Islamic poet, Imru al-Qays, in his *Muallaqah* says:

مَكْرٌ مِفْرٌ مُقْبِلٌ مُدْبِرٌ مَعَاً كَجُلْمُودٍ صَخْرٍ حَطَّهُ السَّيْلُ مِنْ عَلٍ

Now wheeling, now charging, advancing, retreating,

All at once,

Like a mighty boulder the torrent has washed

⁷⁰Ibid.

Down from the heights.⁷¹

In his poem “Al-Awdah li Jaikur” [The Return to Jaikur] Al-Sayyab uses the paradox when he says:

Death struggle

No death.

Speech

No sound.

Labour

No birth⁷²

In his poem “Mudhakkirat al-Malik Ajib ibn al-Khasib” [*Memoirs of the King Ajib ibn al-Khasib*] Abd al-Sabur ironically presents paradoxical verses:

قصر أبي في غابة التنين

يضح بالمنافيين والمحاربين والمؤدبين

My father's palace, in the dragon's forest

Is stuffed with hypocrites, warriors and polite⁷³

The metaphysical poet John Donne is regarded to be the first English poet who utilized the device of paradox in English poetry. According to Abram's *A Glossary of Literary Terms*, ‘The paradox is used occasionally by almost all poets, but was a persistent and central device in seventeenth-century metaphysical poetry’. The American critic, Cleanth Brooks states that, the language of poetry is the language of paradox. However, the element of paradox is regarded as a feature of poetic modernism. Jonathan

⁷¹The translation taken from *The Mute Immortals Speak Pre-Islamic Poetry and the Poetics of Ritual*, a book by Suzanne Pinckney Stetkevych, P. 254.

⁷²My translation.

⁷³Ibid.

Culler in his book *Literary Theory A Very Short Introduction*, says:

For new critics (Cleanth Brooks, John Crowe Ransom, W. K. Wimsatt), the task of criticism was to elucidate individual works of art. Focusing on ambiguity, paradox, irony, and the effects of connotation and poetic imagery, the New Criticism sought to show the contribution of each element of poetic form to a unified structure. (Culler 122)

vi. Language of Fragmentation and Discontinuity

Modernist poem is discerned as a fragmented and broken text. However, the technique of fragmentation does not widely pervade the poetry of Al-Sayyab and Salah Abd al-Sabur as it is seen in poems of Adonis and other Arab modernist poets. In his poem “Madinah Bila Matar” [A City without Rain] Al-Sayyab expresses his indignation against the regime through the masques of Tammuz and Astarte. According to Dr. Abd Al-Rahman Al-Qaud, the fragmentation of Al-Sayyab’s poem “A City Without Rain” was due to Al-Sayyab’s fear of the regime.⁷⁴ In this poem Al-Sayyab says:

A fire with no flames keeps our city awake at night.

Its lanes and houses have fever. When the fever goes

And sunset colors it with all the clouds it carried.

A spark is about to fly, its dead are about to rise

“Tammuz has awakened from his muddy sleep under the grape bowers,

Tammuz has awakened, returned to green Babel to care for it” (Boullata 3)

The American poet and writer, Tony Hoagland remarks that fragmentation in poetry is used as psychological expression and perceptual impression to imply the

⁷⁴Abd Al-Rahman Mohammed Al-Qaud, *Al-Ibham fi Shir Al-Hadathah* [The Vagueness in the Poetry of Modernism] (Kuwait: Assiyasah Press) 216.

fracture and disorder of modern life.

Element of discontinuity is discernable in Arabic traditional poetry, however Arabic traditional poem is still characterized by its harmonious and coherent construction of language. While discontinuity in a modernist poem is not merely due to variation in subjects and fragmentation in the text, but due to the lack of coherent sentences and ideas. Eliot's poems display discontinuity when Eliot goes from one subject to another utilizing allusions and fragmentation.

2.3.2 Technique of Irony

Irony has been deployed in the ancient Arabic poetry since the Pre-Islamic period. However, the modernist poem often draws upon irony and implies discrepancies between the literal meaning of the text and its actual meaning. In his poem “Unshudat Al-Matar” [Rain Song] Al-Sayyab ironically criticizes the situation in Iraq when he says:

There is famine in Iraq:
People watch the corn harvests thrown
To the crows and locusts
And grinders pounding
Grains and stones in the fields
Rain . . .
Rain . . .
Rain⁷⁵ . . .

In his poem “Al-Mukhbir” [The Informer] Al-Sayyab ironically speaks on behalf of the informer and says:

⁷⁵Translated by Abdullah al-Udhari, *Modern Poetry of the Arab World* (Middlesex: Penguin, 1986) 31.

أنا ما تشاء : أنا الحقير
 صباغ أحذية الغزاة ، و بائع الدم و الضمير
 للظالمين . أنا الغراب
 يقتات من جثث الفراخ . أنا الدمار ، أنا الخراب !
 شفة البغي أعفّ من قلبي ، و أجنحة الذباب
 أنقى و أدفأ من يدي . كما تشاء . . . أنا الحقير !

I am what you want: I am base
 A shoe polisher for the invaders
 And a vendor of blood and conscience
 For tyrants. I am a crow
 That feeds on the corpses of birds. Destruction I am
 I am ruination!
 A whore's lip is more chaste than my heart,
 And flies' wings are purer and warmer than my hands.
 As you wish... I am contemptible!⁷⁶

In his poem "The People of My Country" Abd al-Sabur is ironic when he says:

The people of my country wound like falcons
 Their songs are like the chill of winter in the rain's locks
 Their laughter hisses like flame through firewood
 Their footsteps dent the firm earth
 They kill, steal, drink, belch,
 But they have their human worth and are good. (Jayyusi 123)

Similarly, in English poetry, irony as a literary technique is discernable in the Old

⁷⁶My translation.

and Medieval English poetry. Muecke⁷⁷ states that irony is significantly present in the works of the major writers among them Homer, Aristophanes, Plato, Cicero, Horace, Chaucer, Shakespeare, Swift, Pope, Byron, Henry James, Chekhov, Shaw, Proust, Thomas Mann and Kafka. Claire Colebrook, in her book *Irony: the New Critical Idiom* says “until the Renaissance, irony was theorized within rhetoric and was often listed as a type of allegory.”⁷⁸

2.3.3 Technique of Unconventional Metaphor

Traditional metaphor in poetry is a figurative expression through which the poets imply another meaning. Utilizing this linguistic phenomenon in Arabic poetry as a literary device has begun early since the pre-Islamic period. Metaphor in Arabic is called *Istiarah* which literally means ‘borrowing’. Ibn al-Athir (1160-1233) in his book *Al-Mathal Al-Sa'ir Fi Adab Al-Katib Wa al-Sha'ir* [The Current Model for the Literary Discipline of the Writer And Poet] states that this figure of speech is named ‘*Istiarah*’ because the origin of figurative metaphor is drawn from its literal meaning ‘loan’. The poet borrows an expression- that literally denotes a specific meaning- and utilizes it for another expression which is not related to its literal meaning; for instance ‘the sky cries’ the word ‘cries’ has been borrowed for ‘rains’. Metaphor was analysed by ancient Arab critics such as Al-Jahiz (781-868), Ibn Qutayba (828- 889), Ibn al-Mu'tazz (861-908), Abu Hilal Al-Askari (920- 1005), Abd Al-Qahir Al-Jurjani, and Al-Khatib Al-Qazwini (1268-1338). In Arabic traditional poetry, metaphor is logically drew on analogy. For instance the following line contains a lot of conventional metaphors:

وأمرت لؤلؤا من نرجس وسقت وردا , وعصت على العناب بالبرد

⁷⁷D. C. Muecke, *Iron and the Ironic* (London: Methuen, 1986) 3-4.

⁷⁸Claire Colebrook, *Irony* (London: Routledge, 2004) 7.

She rained pearls of narcissus and watered
Roses, and bit on the jujube by her hails⁷⁹

In this verse, the poet likens the ‘tears’ to the ‘pearls’, the ‘eyes’ to ‘narcissus’, the ‘cheeks’ to ‘roses’, the ‘fingers’ to ‘jujube’ and the ‘teeth’ to ‘hails’ without utilizing the words “as” and “like”. In this verse, metaphor is based on comparison; the poet metaphorically compares the beauty of a lady to the beauty of ‘pearls’, ‘narcissus’, ‘roses’, ‘jujube’ and ‘hails’. Such metaphors are prevalent in Arabic traditional poetry; however, in the Abbasid period, Arab poets like Abu Nuwas, Bashar ibn Burd, Abu Tammam and al-Mutanabbi contravened the norm of metaphor and created exotic metaphors in their poems. In his book *Al-Badi*, Ibn al-Mu’tazz is the first Arab critic who delved into figures of speech and attempted to distinguish metaphors of the old poetry (*Qadeem*) and metaphors of the modern poetry⁸⁰ (*Mohdath*) by quoting examples of old metaphors and modern metaphors. For instance he quoted Abu Dhuayb Al-Hudhali’s verse for the typical old metaphor in which Abu Dhuayb says:

وإذا المنية أنشبت أظفارها ألفيت كل تميمة لا تنفع

When death sinks its claws in, you will find all amulets of no avail.⁸¹

According to Wolfhart Heinrichs, the word “claws” signifies a beast to qualify the word ‘death’. The Abbasid poets starting with Muslim Ibn al-Walid and Bashshar Ibn Burd, and ending with Abu Tammam are credited with extending the use of metaphor. They contravened the norm of metaphor and created exotic metaphors in their poems.

⁷⁹My translation, some attribute these verses to Yazid Ibn Muawiyah (645-683) and others attribute them to Al-Wa’wa’ Al-Dimashqi (d. 595).

⁸⁰S.P. Stetkevych, “Toward A Redefinition of ‘Badi’ Poetry”, *Journal of Arabic Literature* XII, 12(1981), 1-29.

⁸¹The translation of this verse from Arabic is taken from “Paired Metaphors in *Muhdath* poetry”, an essay by Wolfhart Heinrichs, p. 3

Therefore, Adonis regards Arabic modernism as an ongoing process whose pioneers in the classical period were many starting with Muslim Ibn al-Walid and later Abu Tammam⁸². The following verse is among the examples of Abu Tammam's verses that show his exotic metaphor:

لا تسقني ماء الملام فإنني صب قد استعذبت ماء بكائي

Do not pour me the water of blame, for I am

a man in love, I have come to find the water of my weeping sweet.⁸³

In his essay "Paired Metaphors in *Muhdath* Poetry", Wolfhart Heinrichs claims that there are three general features of the *muhdath* metaphor which discerns from old metaphor: the first is generating mechanism of *istiara*, the second is the influx of 'new' metaphors into the formation of 'old' metaphors, the third is the combination of one *istiara* with another, or with other figures of speech, such as antithesis and repetition as the case of Abu Tammam's previous line in which he writes 'water of blame' in contrast to his 'water of weeping'. As the English metaphysical poets created fanciful 'conceit', Arab poets of the 8th and 9th centuries created exotic metaphors. In his book *An Introduction To Arab Poetics*, Adonis says:

Metaphor (*Istiara*) itself is the highest stage of this figurative language. An image has no power to agitate or provoke unless a similarity is established between two things which differ in kind. The more extreme the distance between the two things compared, the stranger the image appears and the more delight it arouses in the soul. An image is admired when through it a person can see two things as like and unlike, harmonious and divergent.

⁸²Muhsin J. Al-Musawi, *Arabic Poetry Trajectories of modernity and tradition* (London: Routledge, 2006) 60.

⁸³My translation.

Metaphor performs a magic operation, 'bringing a harmony to the unharmonious as if shortening the distance between East and West, making opposites agree, and uniting life and death, fire and water'⁸⁴.

(Adonis 46)

Arab modernist poets showed great interest in metaphor and made its usage complicated and exotic by using unusual and fanciful metaphors. Looking at Al-Sayyab's following lines, unconventional and exotic metaphors are discernible as the poet likens the 'eyes' to 'palm groves', and to 'terraces from which the moon recedes':

Your eyes are palm groves refreshed by dawn's breath

Or terraces the moon leaves behind.

When your eyes smile the vines flower

And the lights dance

Like the moon's reflections on a river

Gently sculled at the crack of dawn

Like stars pulsating in the depth of your eyes

That sink in mists of grief like the sea

Touched by the evening's hands. (Al-Udhari 29)

In Arabic and English traditional poetry, metaphor was used as an ornamental device. It began as conventional concept to mean a figure of speech that implies comparison between two unlike entities.⁸⁵ Traditionally, metaphor is used in an analogy between two things, and to substitute one word with another. According to M. H.

⁸⁴ Al-Jurjani, *Asrar Al-Balagha* (Cairo, 1959) 116-118.

⁸⁵ Encyclopedia Britannica.

Abrams, there are four prominent views about metaphor⁸⁶: i) the similarity view which postulates that metaphor is a shifted from literal use of language to a give a new meaning, involving an implicit comparison between two disparate things; ii) the interaction view which is deemed to be among the important theories of metaphor. It focuses on the interaction and refutes the substitution and comparison views; iii) the pragmatic view which claims that there is no distinction between the metaphorical meaning and the literal meaning. It rejects the similarity and interaction views⁸⁷ and claims that understanding the metaphor is based on the ‘speaker’s utterance meaning’; iv) the cognitive view which is considered a new view of metaphor.⁸⁸ In his book *Metaphor: A Practical Introduction*, Zoltan Kovecses states:

A new view of metaphor that challenged all these aspects of the powerful traditional theory in a coherent and systematic way was first developed by George Lakoff and Mark Johnson in 1980 in their seminal study: *Metaphors We Live By*. Their conception has become known as the “cognitive linguistic view of metaphor.” Lakoff and Johnson challenged the deeply entrenched view of metaphor by claiming that (1) metaphor is a property of concepts, and not of words; (2) the function of metaphor is to better understand certain concepts, and not just some artistic or esthetic purpose; (3) metaphor is often not based on similarity; (4) metaphor is used effortlessly in everyday life by ordinary people, not just by special talented people; and (5) metaphor, far from being a superfluous though

⁸⁶M. H. Abrams, *A Glossary of Literary Terms*, 7th Ed, pp. 155-157.

⁸⁷John Searle along with Donald Davidson are the leading proponent of pragmatic view of metaphor.

⁸⁸Max Black, in his book *Models and Metaphors*, postulated three views of metaphor: substitution view, comparison view and interaction view. He rejected the substitution and comparison views and approved the interaction view.

pleasing linguistic ornament, is an inevitable process of human thought and reasoning. (Kovecses viii)

In his essay “Studies in Contemporary Criticism”, T. S. Eliot argues: “Metaphor is not something applied externally for the adornment of style, it is the life of style of language.”⁸⁹ The metaphysical poets are known for their unusual images due to their use ‘conceits’. According to Abrams⁹⁰ “a number of modern poets exploited this type of figure. Examples are T. S. Eliot’s comparison of the evening to ‘a patient etherized upon a table’” The modernist poets go beyond the familiar images therefore, metaphors in their poems are beyond logic and comprehension.

2.3.4 Technique of Peculiar Imagery

Poetic imagery is as old as poetry itself however, it enjoys a very privileged status in modernist poetry. The famous Arab prose writer, Al-Jahiz says that poetry is a craft, a sort of weaving and kind of depicting.⁹¹ Many Arab critics such Qudamah Ibn Jafar Abu Hilal Al-Askari and Abd al-Qahir Al-Jurjani made efforts to elucidate the subject of imagery. Arabic traditional poetry is rich in imagery especially that of metaphors, similes, metonymy, synecdoche and irony, but the peculiar and bizarre imagery are the main distinguishing features of the modernist poetry. The exotic imagery is due to an over use of unconventional metaphors and similes as well as the incongruous words. Poetic imagery are essentially word-pictures which add significant meaning to the poem. Poetry in its essence is imagery⁹², and poetry cannot be poetry without images. The

⁸⁹Michael H. Whitworth, *Reading Modernist Poetry* (Blackwell, 2010) 108.

⁹⁰M. H. Abrams, *A Glossary of Literary Terms*, 7th Ed, (NP: Heinle, 1999) 43.

⁹¹Al-Jahiz, *Kitab Al-Hayawan* [Book of Animals] p. 328

⁹²Abdulhameed Al-Husami, *Modernism in Yemeni Contemporary poetry 1970- 2000* (Sana’a: Ministry of Culture and Tourism, 2004).

modernist poetry is usually characterized by employing images and symbols vividly to produce a complex image through combining them in an abnormal style. Ahmed Hasan Al-Zayyat⁹³ in his book *Defense of Eloquence* says that imagery brings out the mental or the concrete meaning in a picture. Imagery combines the devices of simile, metaphor, metonymy and beauty of expression. A good imagery lies in its ability to communicate ideas and passion. Imagery is the external expression about an internal condition. Egyptian critic Abd al-Qader al-Qot, in his book *Al-Ittijah al-Wijdani fi al-Sha'ir al-Arabi al-Muasir* (Emotional Trend in Contemporary Arabic Poetry), says that imagery is a form of expression used by the poet in context to express one aspect of the poem by using the power of language and its devices such as structure, rhythm, reality, synecdoche, synonyms, antonyms, comparison, analogy and other devices of the artistic expression. Jaber Asfur says that imagery is a special style of expression and its significance lies in its influence on the meaning.

The poetic image is regarded as a linguistic structure. It depends upon embodiment, personification, analogy, and metaphor. It enables a poet to depict sentimental and mental imaginary meaning in order to make the meaning lucid for the reader. Image is a device used by a poet to express his experience. Image is the best device to express because it portrays the experience of the poet as an essential artistic device of expression. Implication, unconventional metaphor, myth and allusion are among the reasons behind the renewal of poetic image in Arabic modernist poetry. The new image in the modernist poetry has become the landmark which differentiates the modernist poem from the traditional one. Image can be realized through its elements such as simile, metaphor, symbol, myth and personification. Poet replaces the ordinary words

⁹³Egyptian writer and Editor.

by the image in order to form a picture in the mind of the reader. The images of alienation, city, and death have been depicted by the modernist poets enormously. In his poem “Jaikur wa al-Madinah” [Jaikur and the City] Al-Sayyab portrays his abhorrence of the city and his deep affinity to his village, Jaikur:

The city streets coil around me:
 Thongs of mud bite into my heart,
 A dull ember in it yields only clay.⁹⁴

Al-Sayyab’s poems are rich in mythical and unconventional metaphors. In his poem “Marthiyyat Jaikur” [An Elegy for Jaikur] Al-Sayyab builds his poetic images on the religious and historical figures such as the Christ, the Greek poet, Homer, Al-Shimr (killer of Husain), as well as the myth of Hercules. In the following lines Al-Sayyab creates a poetic image which is used never before in Arabic poetry:

يا صليب المسيح ألقاك ظلا
 فوق جيكور طائر من حديد
 يا لظل كظلمة القبر في اللون و كالقبر في ابتلاع الخدود

Oh, Messiah’s cross, I meet thee shadow,
 Over Jaikur you are a bird of iron.
 What a shadow! Like a darkness of a grave in colour,
 And like a grave in its swallowing the cheeks⁹⁵

Similarly, in his poem “Ruya fi Aam 1956” [Vision in 1956] Al-Sayyab employs the exotic images such as:

عين بلا أجفان

⁹⁴Translated by Lena Jayyusi and Christopher Middleton, Salma Khadra Jayyusi, ed, *Modern Arabic Poetry: An Anthology* (New York: Columbia UP, 1987) 432.

⁹⁵My translation.

.....
شدق بلا أسنان

.....
أي حشد من وجوه كالحات

من أكف كالتراب

نبتها الآجر و الفولاذ كالأرض اليباب

Eye without lids

.....

Mouth without teeth

.....

What a crowd of gloomy faces,

Of hands like dust

Its plants are bricks and steel like the waste land⁹⁶

Western critics have many definitions for image for instance; it is defined by Ezra Pound as “an intellectual and emotional complex in an instant of time.”⁹⁷ In English poetry, Ezra Pound and T. E. Hulme are the pioneers of English imagism which was regarded as a prelude to English modernism. The difference between the traditional image and modernist image lies in using the image.

2.3.5. Technique of Myth

Mythology emerged as a subject of Study in the early decades of the nineteenth century. In Arabic traditional poetry, there is a scant use of myths, but in the 20th

⁹⁶Ibid.

⁹⁷Mark Wollaeger, *Modernism, Media, and Propaganda : British narrative from 1900 to 1945* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 2006) 81.

century, Arabic poetry became imbued with myths. Al-Sayyab says:

An important aspect of modern poetry is the resort to legends, myths and symbols. The need for symbols and myths has never been as urgent as it is today. For we live in a world that has no poetry about it- I mean that the values that are dominant in it are non-poetic, the final word in it is for matter not for spirit. The things that the poet was able to say and make part of himself have begun to break down one by one or to withdraw to the margin of life. Therefore, direct expression of what is no poetic will not be poetry. So what is the poet to do? He has returned myths, to legends, which still retain their warmth because they are not part of this world; he has returned to them to use them as symbols and to build up from them worlds with which to defy the logic of gold and steel. On the other hand, he has started to create new myths-although his attempts at creating this type of myth are few so far.⁹⁸

Many Arab modernist poets use the myth of Sisyphus as a symbol of agony. In his collection *Aghani Mihyar*, Adonis employs the myth of Sisyphus:

أقسمت ان اكتب فوق الماء

اقسمت ان أحمل مع سيزيف

صخرته الصماء

I swore to write on the water

I swore to carry with Sisyphus

His rock.

⁹⁸Issa Boullata, "The Poetic Technique of Badr Shakir Al-Sayyab (1926-1964)", *Journal of Arabic Literature* vol. 2 (No. 1, 1971) 104 -115.

In comparison, the use of myth arose early in English poetry. Edmund Spenser, Shakespeare and John Milton used it and Romantic and the Victorian poets as well. The English modernist poets such as Eliot, Pound, Auden and Yeats used the myths in their poetry and some modernist poets reject the use of myth because they consider modernism as a radical break with the past. This study will focus on the modernist poets who assert the use of myth. Eliot's masterpiece "The Waste Land" blends description of contemporary life with literary allusions, religious symbols and ancient myths such as vegetation and fertility Gods. The first part of the poem *The Burial of the Dead* refers to several myths of fertility rites in ancient Egypt, Greece and Western Asia such as Osiris, Adonis, Tammuz and Attis. Water is used as a symbol of rebirth. It purifies souls.

2.3.6. Techniques of Allusions and Ambiguous Meanings

Allusion was used in Arabic traditional poetry, but it is used extensively in the modernist poetry. Al-Sayyab employs the technique of allusions widely amongst the Arab modernist poets. He alludes to figures from east and west for instance, in his poem "Thikra Liqa" [Memoirs of a Meeting], Al-Sayyab alludes to John Keats. In his essay "The Poetic Technique of Badr Shakir Al-Sayyab", Issa Boullata remarks that Al-Sayyab, in his poem "Min Ru'ya Fukai" [From Fukai's Vision], alludes to the Chinese myth 'Conghai' and alludes to Cain, Abel, Jenghis Khan, Christ, St. John, Ariel, Carcia Lorca, Shakespeare's *The Tempest* and Edith Sitwell's *Lullaby*. In his poem "For I am Stranger", Al-Sayyab alludes to the story of Mary in Quran: ((And shake towards thyself the trunk of the palm-tree: It will let fall fresh ripe dates upon thee))⁹⁹. Al-Sayyab says:

If I shake the branches

⁹⁹The Holy Quran, trans. Abdullah Yusuf Ali, *Surah* of Mary no.19, *Ayah* 25.

Only decay will drop from them

Stones

Stones —not fruit. (Khouri 89)

In his poem “Sifr Ayyub” [Book of Job] Al-Sayyab alludes to the prophet Ayyub [Job] who suffered from calamities, but did not repine, because of his patience. As Al-Sayyab also suffered from incurable disease, he was inspired by image of the prophet Ayyub. He also alludes to Ayyub in his poem “Qalu Li Ayyub” [They Said to Job].

In the poem, “Al-Mumis Al-Amya” [The Blind Harlot], Al-Sayyab alludes to Johann Goethe’s play *Faust* Al-Sayyab mentions in his notes on this poem that after Faust accepted to sell his soul to the devil, the devil restored Faust’s youth and granted him the pearls and the worth, and showed him the ghost of Helen. In the following lines, Al-Sayyab alludes to many things: to the legend of Faust and Mephistopheles, to Goethe’s play *Faust* and to Helen, the daughter of Zeus according to the Greek myths.

شيطان المدينة

لم يحظ ، من هذا الرهان ، بغير أجساد مهينة

"فاوست" في أعماقهن يعيد أغنية حزينة

المال ، شيطان المدينة ، رب "فاوست" الجديد

.....

الخيز والأسمال حظ عبيده المتذللين

مما يوزع من عطايا – لا اللالي والشباب ،

والمومس العجفاء – لا "هلين"

From this wager, city devil¹⁰⁰procures

¹⁰⁰ According to the German myths, the Lord debates with the devil and challenges him, that devil cannot lead astray the Lord's servant 'Faust'. The devil declares that Faust is like the all people; and asks the Lord

Nothing, but despised bodies.

In their profundity, "Faust" repeats a mournful song

Worth and city devil are Faust's new Lord.

.....

Bread and rags are his humbled servants' portion

Of the distributed grants- not the pearls and youth,

And gaunt harlot- not "Helen"¹⁰¹

Similarly, Abd al-Sabur employs the technique of allusions in his poetry and alludes to historical and mythical figures.

The ambiguous meaning of the modernist text can be ascribed to the fragmentation of the content and the use of juxtapositional and paradoxical sentences. It also caused by using unconventional metaphor, exotic imagery, foreign words, allusions and ancient myths as well as the incomplete sentences. The following verses are taken from Eliot's "The Hollow Men" as an example of the incomplete verses:

For Thine is

Life is

For Thine is. (92-94)

to give Faust to him for some time. The Lord accepts the wager. The devil offers Faust to restore his youth and serves him as a slave. Faust agrees to sell his soul to the devil for sake of youth and pleasures, and begins to indulge in sensual pleasures. After transforming Faust into a handsome young man, the devil informs Faust that henceforth, every woman whom he meets will see him as handsome as Helen. Faust indulges in sexual relation with Margaret and kills her brother. Margaret gives birth a baby and kills him, and then she dies. The devil thinks that he won his wager with the Lord because Faust has sinned much. The devil claims the soul of Faust but the angels descend and take Faust's soul to heaven.

¹⁰¹My translation.

2.3.7. Technique of Free Verse

Free verse is a new technique of versification by using a new metrical unit based on the single foot instead of multi-footed traditional verse. Nazik Al-Malaika, in her book *Qadhaya Al-Shi'r Al-Mu'asir* [Issues of Contemporary Poetry] mentioned that there was an attempt to break the rules of Arabic traditional prosody since the 8th century such as Abu Al-Atahiyah and since the rise of the *Andalusian Muwshahat*. Al-Sayyab is celebrated to be the first Arab poet to use free verse as an acceptable technique in modern Arabic poetry. In English poetry, the attempt to write free verse began in the 19th century by poets like William Blake and Matthew Arnold. However, Walt Whitman is celebrated to be the first English free-verse American poet.

Arabic and English modernisms both popularized free verse. In his book *Modernism*, Peter Childs says that modernism in Britain began with the imagism movement, which popularized free verse. Al-Sayyab states that free verse is more than a prosodic renewal: "Free verse is more than a variation of the number of similar feet in different verses. It is a new technical structure, a new realist trend that came to crush romantic limpness, the literature of ivory towers, and the rigidity of classicism."¹⁰² Arab modernist poets followed Al-Sayyab and abandoned the traditional prosody. The revolt against the traditional prosody is in variably linked to the social, political and cultural upheals which occurred in the Arab world in the 20th century that demanded such type of ingenious change and renewal.

¹⁰²Ibid.

CHAPTER THREE

COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF THE POETRY OF AL-SAYYAB AND ABD AL-SABUR

3.1. Al-Sayyab's Poetic Vision

Poetic vision can be grasped by analyzing imagery, myths and symbols in a poem, by tracing the poet's vision of the universe, the human and life, and by looking at the poet's estimation of the conflict between good and evil. Therefore, vision remains a relative concept, which expresses the viewpoints of the creators who create their daily artistic experiences. The poet's vision is an artistic response to his experiences of life and not an intellectual or philosophic response.¹ Salma Jayyusi argues: "The idea of foreknowledge, vision and insight is one of the finest which the new poets insisted upon, but it must be remembered that this is not limited to the new poetry"². For some Arab modernist poets, vision is an incarnation of modernism, and modernism itself is a vision. It is an obsession and a creative mechanism for the modernist poet.

For Adonis, poetry and vision are among the essential elements that determine the whole concept of the poetic modernism. He states that vision is an infringement of the prevailing norms. According to Abdullah Assaf,³ the poet's vision can be traced through his/ her employment of imagery, myth, and symbol or through tracing the attitudes of the poet towards a cause. He adds that the elements of lived experience, poetic experience, objective intuition and Ideology, as well as the consciousness of reality together strengthen the vision. Therefore, the poet's vision is not a mirror of reality, but it is his opinion on reality and his attitude towards it.

¹Mohyy Din Subhi, *Al-Ru'aya Fi Shi'r Al-Bayyati* [The Vision in the Poetry of Al-Bayyati] (Iraq, 1987)

²Salma Khadra Jayyusi, *Trends and Movements in Modern Arabic Poetry* (Leiden: Brill, 1977) 599.

³Abdullah Assaf, *Al-Surah Al-Faniyyah Fi Qasidat Al-Ru'ya* [The Aesthetic Imagery in the Poem of Vision] (Syria: Dar Dijlah, 1996).

Looking at Al-Sayyab's poems, according to Naji Allush,¹ Al-Sayyab passes through four phases of his life: the Romanticism from 1934 to 1948, Realism from 1949 to 1955, and the Tammuzian phase from 1956 to 1960 then the Subjectivity or the Personality phase from 1961 to 1964. It seems that, the common vision in most of his poems is painful. In a broad sense, Al-Sayyab suffered socially, politically and physically and the implications of such sufferings are pervasive in his poems. Salma Khadra Jayyusi in her essay "Contemporary Arabic Poetry- Vision and Attitudes" states: "Al-Sayyab was a highly perceptive poet who, even in his more optimistic poems divining a happy future for the oppressed (e.g. the Marxist inspired 'Unshudat al-Matar'), could discover all the universal laws of necessity that combine to break a man and eventually to destroy him"². Al-Sayyab's "Unshudat al-Matar" [Rain Song], reveals his vision of revolution and freedom. It also depicts the situation in Iraq, which is rich in oil resources while the Iraqis suffer. The image of thousands of serpents refers to the colonizers and the enemies of Iraq whether they are Iraqis or invaders.

Al-Sayyab's leftist poems such as "Fajr al-Salaam" [Dawn of Peace], and "Al-Asliha wa-al-Atfal" [Weapons and Children] dealt with war and peace, freedom and slavery, construction and deconstruction. During his membership in the communist party from 1946 until 1954, he also composed "Haffar al-Qubur" [The Gravedigger] 1952, "Al-Mumis al-Amya" [The Blind Harlot] 1954. The four leftist poems depict the political conflict and war in Iraq and the world. In his poem "Fajr al-Salaam" [Dawn of Peace],

¹Allush's preface in *Badr Shakir of Al-Sayyab, Complete Poetic Collection*, vol. I.

²R. C. Ostle, ed, *Studies in Modern Arabic Literature* (University of London, 1995) 50.

Al- Sayyab formed his vision of peace by exposing the images of war such as death, fire, darkness, tombs, the dead, ruin, hunger, charcoal, and *Qabil*³:

فالجو مقبرة كبرى . . معلقة
تستعرض الشمس في ذراتها الحقبا
والأرض كالأبرص المنبوذ هراءه
داء وعانى عليه الجوع والعتبا
تكدست فوقها الأجساد ناضحة
قيحاً ودوى عويل الناس واصطخبا

And the air is a big hanged grave
Through its atoms, the sun reviews the epochs.
And the earth is like an ostracized leaper,
Lacerated by malady and suffered from hunger and fatigue.
Bodies have accumulated on it, perspiring pus,
And the wailing of people has resounded and clamored⁴

The images of peace are noticed in the words that denote ‘life’ and ‘hope’ such as children, generations, eyes, moon, fields, flowers, and cities:

There peace gently falls downward, covers all, like a sleeping child’s
eyelashes
Its laughter will fill the fields, and its songs of love, [sic]
It will throb [like a heartbeat] where the factories wound the heart of
darkness,

³Al-Sayyab alludes to *Qabil* as a symbol of evil because *Qabil* is the first son of Adam and Eve and the first man commits the crime of murder in the earth when he killed his brother *Habil*. The Noble Quran mentions the story of *Habil* and *Qabil* in *Surah al-Maidah* [The Table Spread with Food], verses 27-31.

⁴My translation.

And in the sun struck cities, it will steal [its way], amidst the crowds,
 And where the eyes of humankind, staring, meet in harmony and concord,
 In spite of blazing fire and iron, a flower of peace will have grown.⁵

Al-Sayyab's poem "Haffar al-Qubur" [Gravedigger] is a negative image of the city. M.M. Badawi in his book *A Critical Introduction to Modern Arabic Poetry* says: "It is a gloomy poem and somewhat naïve, partly inspired by the poet's experience in the sleazy quarters of Baghdad as an impecunious young man after his dismissal from his job as a school teacher on account of his membership of the Iraq Communist Party."⁶

Like a sad dream, the sunset light clouds the graves
 Weakly as orphans smile or as candles fade
 In the darkness of memory overshadowing tears;
 Flights of birds bluster over the far plain
 Like black tempests or like ghosts in an old house
 Appearing to frighten its inhabitants
 From a dark room in it.
 The distant wrecked hut yawns- the dark night staring
 From its blind door and its senseless, dilapidated windows.
 The atmosphere is filled with the [owl's] hoot
 Which the desert echoes in despair and monotonous wail
 With diminishing reverberations
 That the wind winnows on the far hill with boredom.⁷

⁵From Al-Sayyab's poem "Fajr al-Salaam" [Dawn of Peace], translated by Terri DeYoung.

⁶M. M. Badawi, *A Critical Introduction to Modern Arabic Poetry* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1975) 252.

⁷Issa J. Boullata, trans, *Journal of Arabic Literature*, vol. 2 (No 1, 1971) 104 -115.

According to M.M Badawi, Al-Sayyab's poem "The Grave Digger" depicts the evil of making a living out of the death and destruction. The character of the gravedigger is evil, rapacious, and inhumane.

يا رب . . ما دام الفناء
هو غاية الأحياء ، فأمر يهلكوا هذا المساء !
سأموت من ظمأ و جوع
إن لم يمت — هذا المساء إلى غد بعض الأنام

Oh, Lord as long as extinction is
The end of the livings, destroy them this evening
I will die from thirst and hunger
Unless this evening up to tomorrow some people die⁸

According to M. M. Badawi, in the last lines of the poem "The Grave Digger", Al-Sayyab complicates the scene by making the gravedigger 'an unlovable and sensual character who leads a debauched life, spending his earnings on prostitutes. 'There is a sardonic paradox in the poet's making him recover the money he has paid to a certain prostitute by being asked to dig her grave after her death'⁹:

ماتت كمن ماتوا ، وواراها كما وارى سواها :
واسترجعت كفاه من يدها المحطمة الدفينة
ما كان أعطاها ...
.....
ويظل حفار القبور
ينأى عن القبر الجديد

⁸My translation.

⁹M. M. Badawi, *A Critical Introduction to Modern Arabic Poetry* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1975) 252.

متعثر الخطوات . . يحلم باللقاء ، وبالخمور !

She died like those who have died, and buried her as he has buried others

And his hands retrieved from her buried destroyed hand

What he had been giving her. . .

.....

And the gravedigger is still

Going away from the new grave

Blocked in his steps . . . dreams of ladies and wine¹⁰

In his poem “Al-Mumis al-Amya” [The Blind Harlot] Al-Sayyab’s vision explores the social and political crises in Iraq and the world. Like his poem “The Grave Digger”, the poem depicts the conflict between the values and the desires:

عمياء كالخفاش في وضح النهار ، هي المدينة ،

والليل زاد لها عماها .

والعابرون :

.....

من هؤلاء العابرون ؟

أحفاد ((أوديب)) الضرير ووارثوه المبصرون .

Blind like the bat in the daylight, the city is,

And the night has augmented its blindness

And the passersby:

.....

Who are these passersby?

Progenies of the blind “Oedipus” and his sighted inheritors are.¹¹

¹⁰My translation.

“Al-Aslihah wa-al-Atfal” [Weapons and Children] is built on the fight between innocence and beauty represented by children, and the aggression and evil represented by the warmongers:

Birds? Or young boys laughing
 As light plays upon their [faces]?
 And their bare feet
 Seashells chiming within a waterwheel,
 The hems of their dishdashas like the northern breeze
 Traveling [at night] across a field of ripe wheat
 Or the hissing of bread [baking] on a holiday,
 Or a mother murmuring her newborn’s name,
 Cuddling him on his first day.
 As though I hear sails flapping
 And the tumult as Sindbad puts out to sea.
 He saw his vast treasure between the ribs
 He chose no other as his treasure-then he returned! (DeYoung 102)

3.2. Abd al-Sabur’s Poetic Vision

Abd al-Sabur’s poetic vision went through phases: the Marxist vision, the existentialist vision and the mystic vision. He believed that the function of poetry is to affirm the humanistic values such as freedom, justice and truth. Abd al-Sabur states that the poet does not express life, but creates another one equivalent to it. He states that when the poet expresses without creativity, his work reflects a lack of comprehensive vision.

¹¹Ibid.

Abd al-Sabur possessed a modern vision of life. He perceived that the world is a blend of good and evil and such a vision caused him deep sorrow. However, he said about himself that he is not a sad poet, but he agonizes because of the ugliness of the world and due to his desire to reform it. Abd al-Sabur was among the pioneers of Arabic free verse. He believed that poetry is creatation and that it is not merely an image of the self or reality. He believes that poetry is a new world relatively independent from the objective self. For him, poetry is a vision that exceeds the limitation of place and time that transcends the concrete to be abstract. Poetry is not a copy of an idea or a display of an opinion, but it is a new method of thinking and expression. Abd al-Sabur had a deep vision of life. He began his poetry with a tragic vision of the world due to an existentialist view on life. Therefore Abd al-Sabur was described by critics as a sad poet. Later, his vision of life became mystical. His collection *Al-Nas fi Biladi* [The People in My Country, 1957] was composed when he was influenced by Marxism. In his poem "People of my Country", he says:

The people of my country wound like falcons
 Their songs are like the chill of winter in the rain's locks
 Their laughter hisses like flame through firewood
 Their footsteps dent the firm earth
 They kill, steal, drink, belch,
 But they have a handful of money
 They hold fast to their belief in fate.¹²

¹²Translated by Lena Jayyusi and John Health-Stubbs, Salma Khadra Jayyusi, ed, *Modern Arabic Poetry: An Anthology* (New York: Columbia UP, 1987) 123.

3.3. Al-Sayyab's Self-Concealment

Unlike Salah Abd al-Sabur, Al-Sayyab is a poet and not a critic so he did not write about personality and impersonality. Most of Al-Sayyab's poems bear stamps of his personality except his collection *Unshudat al-Matar* [Rain Song, 1960]. This collection contains his long poems "Haffar al-Qubur" [The Gravedigger, 1951], "Al-Mumis Al-Amya" [The Blind Harlot, 1954], "Al-Aslihah wa-al-Atfal" [Weapons and Children, 1955] in which Al-Sayyab intended to make a radical change in Arabic poetic and political life. Such poems dealt with revolution, the hope of change as well as the social problems of poverty, war, corruption and aggression. Due to his anguish in the last period of his life, Al-Sayyab returned to write about the self and wrote three collections: *Al-Mabad al-Ghareeq* [The Sunken Temple, 1962], *Mansil al-Aqnan* [The House of Slaves, 1963], *Shanasheel Ibnat al-Jalabi* [The Balcony of the Nobleman's Daughter, 1964], and *Iqbal* 1965.

3.4. Abd al-Sabur's Self-Concealment

Abd al-Sabur's theory on personality and impersonality in poetry differs from Eliot's theory. Abd al-Sabur mentioned that personality and impersonality were misused in the field of art when some writers proclaimed impersonality as the standard of a good literary work. For Abd al-Sabur, personality and impersonality come together to form a good art and every good literary work is personal and impersonal at the same time. He criticized some critics who believed that the poet is considered personal when he expresses himself and considered impersonal when he expresses things about life. He states that such a perspective is epidemic in the critical measurement because it contrasts the mind and the sense, the material and the spirit and between the human and universe.

He states that art is not only an expression, but also an interpretation. Abd al-Sabur argues that self-consciousness is the starting point of self-criticism, and self-criticism is the first step of progress. He adds that introspection promotes a language for self-dialogue.

3.5. Al-Sayyab's and Abd al-Sabur's Views on Heritage

Al-Sayyab and Abd al-Sabur did not reject cultural heritage. They assert the link between the past and the present. Al-Sayyab says that he does not worship the past, meanwhile he also does not deny it. He states that to revolt against the past just because it is a past, is a kind of madness and regression. Then he questions how he can live if he lost his past. He states that literary heritage should be reviewed in order to discard what is bad in it. It should go forward with what is good in it. Similarly, Abd al-Sabur did not snub Arabic heritage or belittle its significance, but he criticized two contradictory views about Arabic cultural heritage: the first view looks at the history of Arabic civilization as perfect and an archetype of the ideal nations. Therefore, Arabic cultural heritage should be resurrected in the 20th century, as it is valid for all times. This group looks at Arabic heritage proudly being written in Arabic about what was once upon a time a dominating culture in the world. The second view compares Arabic heritage with contemporary requirements and declare that such heritage is invalid for the modern life. Abd al-Sabur says that both two views emerged due to the invasion of the Arab world by the West. The first group searched for the source of power in their heritage while the second group preferred to imitate the powerful colonization. Abd al-Sabur states that the blend between Arabic history and Arabic literature, and the one between modern culture and modern politics are inaccurate; and literature should be treated as independent entities as well as

the cultures. He adds that culture is a living heritage which links between the past and the present and goes towards the future.

3.6. Al-Sayyab's and Abd al-Sabur's Poetic Themes

Both Al-Sayyab and Abd al-Sabur deal with modernist themes such as alienation, death and the city with different views. Several poems reveal Al-Sayyab's feelings of the geographical and psychological alienation especially in his poems composed during his treatment in London, Paris, Beirut and Kuwait. "Ya Ghurbat Al-Ruh" [O Alienation of the Soul] is among Al-Sayyab's famous poems of alienation composed during his illness in London. In this poem, Al-Sayyab's ordeal of alienation looms powerfully starting from its opening lines:

يا غربة الروح في دنيا من الحجر
والثلج والقار والفولاذ والضجر ،
يا غربة الروح . . لا شمس فأتلتق
فيها ولا أفق
يطير فيها خيالي ساعة السحر .

.....
يا غربة الروح في دنيا من الحجر !
مسدودة كل افاقي بأبنية
سود ، وكانت سمائي يلهت البصر
في شطها مثل طير هذه السفر

Oh, alienation of the soul in the world of stone,

Snow, tar, steel and ennui

Oh, alienation of the soul . . Neither sun that I sparkle in it,

Nor horizon that my fantasy flies at the hour of dawn.

.....

Oh, alienation of the soul in the world of stone!

All my horizons are blocked by black buildings

And on the strand of my sky, the sight gasps

Like a bird fatigued by the journey.¹³

A city life as a source of alienation is expressed in Al-Sayyab's poem "Sifr Ayyub" [Ayyub's Book]. In this poem he exposes the city as the reason for his sense of alienation. He describes the life in London as:

في لندن الليل مَوّت نزع السّهر

و البرد و الضّجر

و غربة في سواد القلب سوداء

.....

أيّها الثلج رحماك إني غريب

في بلاد من البرد و الجوع سكرى

In London, night is like a death, its death struggle

Is sleeplessness, cool, tedium,

And a black alienation on the heart's blackness

.....

Oh, snow, mercy stranger I am

In a country, that is drunk with cold and hunger.¹⁴

¹³My translation.

¹⁴Ibid.

“Stranger by the Gulf and “The Rain Song”, are among Al-Sayyab’s poems which he composed while he was exiled in Kuwait. In his poem “Li Anni Gharib” [For I am a Stranger], written in Beirut, Al-Sayyab declares his estrangement:

لأنني غريب
لأن العراق الحبيب
بعيد ، و أني هنا في اشتياق
إليه ، إليها ... أنادي : عراق
فيرجع لي من ندائي نحيب
تفجر عنه الصدى
أحسّ بأنني عبرت المدى
إلى عالم من ردى لا يجيب
ندائي

For I am a stranger
Beloved Iraq
Far distant, and I here in my longing
For it, for her ... I cry out: Iraq
And from my cry a lament returns
An echo bursts forth
I feel I have crossed the expanse
To a world of decay that responds not
To my cry¹⁵

Similarly, “Fi al-Lail” [At Night], “Al-bab Taqrauhu al-Riyah” [The Wind is

¹⁵Translated from Arabic by Mounah A. Khouri and Hamid Algar, *An Anthology of Modern Arabic Poetry* (California: University of California Press, 1974) 89.

Knocking at the Door], “Lailah in London” [A Night in London], “Lailah in Paris” [A Night in Paris], “Ahibeeni” [Love me], “Nasim min al-Qabr” [A Zephyr from the Grave], “Ukkaz fi al-Jahim” [Crutch in the Hell], and “Nafs wa Qabr” [Soul and Grave] are also among the poems which reveal Al-Sayyab’s tribulations of alienation in the last phase of his life.

Unlike Al-Sayyab, Salah Abd al-Sabur did not suffer from persecution and did not leave his country fearing of persecution. However, the theme of alienation looms in many of his poems. Abd al-Sabur’s influence of Marxism, his conversion to existentialism, and eventually his return to the religious life reveals a sense of ideological confusion and this promoted his feeling of alienation. He was called ‘the sad poet’ for his poems which are characterized by sorrow and contemplation. Describing himself, he distinguishes that he is not a sad poet, but an agonized poet. In his poem “Rihlah fi al-Lail” [Journey at Night], he reveals:

الليل يا صديقي ينفذني بلا ضمير
ويطلق الظنون في فراشي الصغير
ويثقل الفؤاد بالسواد
ورحلة الضياع في بحر الحداد

Oh, my friend, the night shakes me without conscience
And lunches the doubts into my small bed
And burdens my heart with blackness
And the lost journey in the mourning sea.¹⁶

In his poem “Al-Huzn” [The Sorrow], unlike the ordinary people who begin their life with cheerfulness, Abd al-Sabur explains his pains and agonies as follows:

¹⁶My translation.

يا صاحبي ، إني حزين

طلع الصباح ، فما ابتسمت ، ولم ينر وجهي الصباح

.....

وأتى المساء

في غرفتي دلف المساء

والحزن يولد في المساء لأنه حزن ضرير

حزن طويل كالطريق من الجحيم إلى الجحيم

Oh, friend, I am sad

Morning has risen, but I smiled not, and morning lit my face not

.....

Evening has come

Into my room evening entered

And the sorrow is born in the evening because it is a blind sorrow

A long sorrow as the road from hill to hill.¹⁷

To emphasize the meaning of sorrow in his life, Abd al-Sabur's poem "Risalah ila Sadiqa" [A Letter to A Girlfriend] uncovers the feelings of depression in his life:

هذا الصباح...

أدرت وجهي للحياة ، واغتمضت ، كي أموت

في هدأة السكون

قد آن للشعاع أن يغيب

قد آن للغريب أن يؤوب

This morning ...

I returned my face to the life, I closed my eyes to die

¹⁷Ibid.

In repose of calmness

It is time for the ray to set

It is time for the stranger to return.¹⁸

“Al-Shaye al-Hazeen” [The Mournful Object] is another poem that expresses Abd al-Sabur’s sadness. Though he is sorrowful, he finds some pleasure in his potential sadness:

هناك شيء في نفوسنا حزين

قد يختفي ، ولا يبين

لكنه مكنون

شيء غريب ... غامض... حنون

In our souls there is a sad object

It may disappear and do not come out

But it is cherished

Peculiar thing ...obscure ... affectionate.¹⁹

For Badr Shakir Al-Sayyab, the city is a hotbed of corruption, impurity, seduction and death. He looks at Baghdad as a big brothel. In his long poems, “Haffar Al-Qubur” [The Gravedigger, 1951], “Al-Mumis Al-Amya” [The Blind Harlot, 1954], “Al-Aslihah wa-al-Atfal” [Weapons and Children, 1955], “Fajr Al-Salaam” [Dawn of Peace], Al-Sayyab deals with the social catastrophes of the cities which arise from wars, poverty and inhuman inhabitants of the city. In his poems, “Al-Mukhbir” [The Informer], “Madinat al-Sindabad” [The City of Sindabad], “Cerberus in Babel”, “Madinah Bila Matar” [A City without Rain] Al-Sayyab links between the city and oppression. While in his poems,

¹⁸Ibid.

¹⁹Ibid.

“Madinat Al-Sarab” [City of The Mirage], “Al-Awdah li Jaikur” [The Return to Jaikur], “Jaikur wa al-Madinah” [Jaikur and the City], “Al-Mabgha” [The Whorehouse] Al-Sayyab discloses himself as a poet who abhors the city, but is fond of his country. In his poem “Madinat Al-Sarab” [City of The Mirage], Al-Sayyab announces the disharmony in the city:

عشر سنين سرتها إليك ، يا ضجيعة تنام
معي وراء سورها ، تنام في سرير ذاتها ،
و ما انتهى السّفار
إليك يا مدينة السراب ، يا ردى حياتها.
.....
وأنت يا ضجيعتي ، مدينة نائية
مسدودة أبوابها وخلفها وقفت في انتظار.

Ten years I walked to you (to sleep with me),
Oh, bedfellow that sleeps behind its fence,
That sleeps on the bed of itself,
However, journey is not over
To you oh mirage city, oh a demise of its life.

.....
And you, oh my bedfellow, a faraway city

Its gates are plugged and behind them, I stood awaiting.²⁰

In his poem “Al-Mabgha” [The Whorehouse] Al-Sayyab depicts Baghdad as a whorehouse:

بغداد ؟ مبغى كبير

²⁰Ibid.

(لواحظ المغنّية

كساعة تتكّ في الجدار

في غرفة الجلوس في محطة القطار)

يا جثة على الثرى مستلقية

Baghdad? Is a big whorehouse

(the eyes of chanteuse are

Like a clock that ticks on the wall

In the sitting room and in the railway station)

Oh, corpse that on the soil is lying.²¹

In his poem “Al-Mumis Al-Amya” [The Blind Harlot], Al-Sayyab tells the story of a female Harlot who becomes unwanted because of her blindness and her old age. Al-Sayyab hints at the misery of human life in the city:

عمياء كالخفاش في وضح النهار، هي المدينة ،

والليل زاد لها عماها .

In the clarity of the daytime

Like the bat, the city is blind

And the night amplified its blindness²².

In his poem “Madinat Al-Sindabad” [The City of Sindabad], Al-Sayyab severely attacks the city when he says:

Let him, for Christ did not call him!

What do you want? His flesh cut into strips and dried

To be sold in the city of sinners,

²¹Ibid.

²²Ibid.

The city of rope and blood and wine,
The city of bullets and boulders!

.....

And is this my city? Are these the ruins
On which was inscribed: "Long live life!"
With the blood of its slain? (Khouri 101-103).

Al-Sayyab does not abhor the city of Baghdad only, but he laments cities in general. In his poem "Sifr Ayyub" [Ayyub's Book], Al-Sayyab complains about London and compares it with his country Jaikur:

بعيدا عنك ، في جيکور ، عن بيتي و أطفالي
تشدّ مخالب الصّوان و الأسفلت و الضّجر
على قلبي ، تمزّق ما تبقيّ فيه من وتر

.....

بعيدا عنك أشعر أنني قد ضعت في الزحمة
و بين نواجز الفولاذ تمضغ أضلعي لقمة

.....

هنا لا طير في الأغصان تشدو غير أطيّار
من الفولاذ تهدر أو تحمم دونما خوف من المطر
و لا أزهار إلا خلف واجهة زجاجيّة
يراح إلى المقابر والسجون بهن والمستشفيات.

Faraway from thee, Jaikur, I am
Faraway from my home and children
That claws of flints, asphalt and boredom

Strain over my heart, they rip what is left of its chord

.....

Faraway from thee, I feel that I lost in the crowd

And among the teeth of the steel my ribs are masticated

.....

Here, no birds on the boughs warble, but birds of steel

That roar or whinny without fear of the rain

And no flowers are there, but behind glassy face,

Taken to the graveyards, jails and hospitals.²³

Unlike Al-Sayyab, Salah Abd al-Sabur reconciles himself to the city; in his poem “Ughniyah Lil Qahirah” [A Song To Cairo], Abd al-Sabur extols his city as he says:

لَقَاكَ يَا مَدِينَتِي حَجِي وَمَبَايَا

لَقَاكَ يَا مَدِينَتِي أَسَايَا

.....

أَهْوَاكَ يَا مَدِينَتِي الْهَوَى الَّذِي يَشْرُق بِالْبُكَاءِ

أَذَا ارْتَوَتْ بِرُؤْيَا الْمَحْبُوبِ عَيْنَاهُ.

Oh my city, meeting you is my Hajj and my weeping place

Oh my city, meeting you is my solace

.....

I love you oh my city, that love which arise with cry

when its eyes quenched with seeing the beloved.²⁴

Abd al-Sabur declares his admiration and love for the city; however in some

²³My translation.

²⁴Ibid.

verses he criticizes the city life, as he reflects in his poem “Ughniyah Lil Shitaa” [A Song to Winter]:

In the torrential rush of the city
 Die, none knowing me
 Die, none weeping for me
 Perhaps it will be said among my friends
 When they gather:
 Here he used to sit but he is gone
 As others have gone
 God rest his soul!²⁵

In his first two collections, *Azhar Thabila* [Withered Flowers] and *Assateer* [Myths], Al-Sayyab views death as a horrible and terrible event. In his poem “Ri'ah Tatamazaq” [A Lung is Lacerating] Al-Sayyab deeply deplores the loss of life when he says:

واحسرتا؟! كذا أموت؟ كما يجف ندى الصباح؟

.....

يا موت يارب المخاوف والدياميس الضريرة

اليوم تأتي؟! من دعاك؟ ومن أرادك أن تزوره؟

What a pity? ! Like that I die?

Like the morning dew dries

.....

Oh death, o lord of fears and the blind dungeons

²⁵Salma Khadra Jayyusi, ed, *Modern Arabic Poetry: An Anthology* (New York: Columbia UP, 1987) 125-126.

Today you are coming? Who called you?

And who wanted you to visit

In the second stage of his poetic life, particularly in his collection *Unshudat Al-Matar* [Rain Song], Al-Sayyab glorifies death. In his poem “Al-Nahr wa Al-Mawt” [The River and Death] Al-Sayyab views death as victory:

my death bells ring and shake my veins,
and in my blood a longing darkens
for a bullet whose deadly ice
might plow through my soul in its depths, hell
setting the bones ablaze.

I want to run out and link hands with others in the struggle,
clench my fists and strike Fate in the face.

I want to drown in my deepest blood
that I may share with the human race its burden
and carry it onward, giving birth to life

My death
shall be a victory.²⁶

Similarly, Al-Sayyab, in his poem “Madinat Al-Sindabad” [The City of Sindabad], perceives that life is hidden in death:

We would like to sleep again,
We would like to die again,
And with our sleep will be buds of awareness,

²⁶Salma Khadra Jayyusi, ed, *Modern Arabic Poetry: An Anthology* (New York: Columbia UP, 1987) 436-437.

And our death will conceal life. (Khouri 95)

In the last stage of his poetic life, Al-Sayyab relapsed and again his fear of death intensified due to his deteriorating health. Therefore his last collections *Al-Mabad al-Ghareeq* [The Sunken Temple], *Mansil al-Aqnan* [The House of Slaves] and *Shanasheel Ibnat Al-Jalabi* [The Balcony of the Nobleman's Daughter] highlight increasingly the theme of death. In his poem "Nida'a al-Mawt" [Call of Death], Al-Sayyab imagines that dead people, including his mother, are calling him to come to the graveyard:

يَمْدُونُ أَعْنَاقَهُمْ مِنْ أُلُوفِ الْقُبُورِ يَصِيحُونَ بِي

أَنْ تَعَالَ

.....

و تَدْعُو مِنْ الْقَبْرِ أُمِّي بَنِيَّ احْتَضَنِي فَبَرْدِ الرَّدَى فِي عُرُوقِي

From thousands of graves, they spread out their necks

Calling me to come.

.....

And my mother from the grave calls

Oh my son, embrace me the coldness of death is in my veins²⁷

Many of Al-Sayyab's poems bear the title of death such as "Al-Wasiyah" [The Will], "Wasiyah min Muhtadher" [A Will from a Dying], "Tha'lab al-Mawt" [The Fox of Death], "Risalah min Maqbarah" [A Message from Graveyard], "Umm al-Brom" (name of a graveyard in Basrah), "Nasim min al-Qabr", [A Zephyr from the Grave], "Nafs wa Qabr" [A Soul and A Grave], "Ukkaz fi al-Jahim" [Crutch in the Hell]. In his poems "Risalah min Maqbarah" [A Message from Graveyard], "Tha'lab al-Mawt" [The Fox of Death] and "Haffar Al-Qubur" [The Gravedigger], Al-Sayyab metaphorically indicates

²⁷My translation.

the death of values and principles. In his poem “Madinat Al-Sindabad” [The City of Sindabad], Al-Sayyab says:

There is death in the streets,
And barrenness in the fields,
And all that we love is dying.

.....

Death is being born in houses,
Cane is being born in order to tear out life

From the womb of earth and from the wellsprings of water²⁸

Al-Sayyab’s poetry reveals a contradictory vision towards death. Although he is one of the Tammuzian poets who celebrate death as a path for new life, obsession with death was always in his mind and the ghost of death was in front of his eyes. In some of his poems Al-Sayyab celebrates death for the sake of Iraq liberation, but in other poems Al-Sayyab welcomes death due to his sense of despair knowing that his disease cannot be cured. In his poem “Fi Ghabat al-Zalam” [In The Forest of Darkness] Al-Sayyab asks death from Allah:

هات الردى ، اريد أن أنام
بين قبور أهلي المبعثرة
وراء ليل المقبرة
رصاصه الرحمة يا إله!

Give death, I want to sleep

Among the dispersed graves of my relatives

²⁸Mounah A. Khouri and Hamid Algar, ed, and trans, *An Anthology of Modern Arabic Poetry* (California: California UP, 1974) 97-101.

Behind the night of the graveyard

Oh God, bullet of mercy!²⁹

Unlike Al-Sayyab, Abd al-Sabur wants to die because life means nothing to him but sorrow. In his poem “Risalah ila Sadiqa” [A Letter to A Girlfriend] Abd al-Sabur says:

يا صديقتي ، إني مريض

وساعدي مكسور

ومهجتي على الفراش كل ساعة تسيل

.....

وأصنع الأكفان ، ثم أنجر التابوت

هذا الصباح...

أدرت وجهي للحياة ، واغتمضت ، كي أموت

في هدأة السكون

قد آن للشعاع أن يغيب

قد آن للغريب أن يؤوب

Oh my girlfriend, I am sick

And my forearm is broken

And my heart blood is streaming

On the bed every hour

.....

Make shrouds and carpenter the coffin

This morning ...

I returned my face to the life, I closed my eyes to die

²⁹My translation.

In repose of calmness

It is time for the ray to set

It is time for the stranger to return.³⁰

In his poem “Maut Fallah” [Death of a Farmer], Abd al-Sabur compares himself with the ordinary farmer who has died on his farm. Unlike Abd al-Sabur, the farmer loves life and wants to live while for Abd al-Sabur, life and death are same:

لم يك يوما مثلنا يستعجل الموت

لأنه كل صباح ، كان يصنع الحياة في التراب

He never was like us to hasten the death

As he was making life in soil every morning.³¹

3.7. Al-Sayyab's And Abd al-Sabur's Poetic Techniques

Abd al-Sabur asserts that the modern poet must employ everyday language. In his poem “Al-Huzn” [The Sorrow] he uses the ordinary diction, such as ‘had tea’, ‘mended my shoes’:

ورجعت بعد الظهر في جيبتي قروش

فشربت شايًا في الطريق

ورتقت نعلي

And afternoon I returned with money in my pocket

In the way, I had a tea

And I mended my shoes.³²

Unlike Abd al-Sabur, Al-Sayyab utilizes vocabulary that is colloquial. Both Al-

³⁰My translation.

³¹Ibid.

³²Ibid.

Sayyab and Abd al-Sabur use some foreign words in their poems. They shared titles in some of their poems, such as 'Lorca' and 'Baudelaire'. Both Al-Sayyab and Abd al-Sabur use the dramatic monologue in their poetry. Al-Sayyab's poem, "Rahal Al-Nahar" [Day has Gone] demonstrates an interior monologue of Sindbad's wife, who waited for Sindbad to return from his adventurous voyages. In this, Al-Sayyab alludes to the condition of his own wife who was wishfully waiting for his return from his medical journey, but as she knows that Al-Sayyab's disease is incurable, she waits for an illusion.³³ Al-Sayyab says:

And here you sit waiting,
 dazed, with whirling thoughts:
 He will come back. No, his ship has gone down headlong.
 He will come back. No, the wailing winds have detained him.
 O Sindbad, will you ever come back?
 The time of my youth has almost run out.
 Lilies have wilted in my cheeks.
 So when will you come back?

 Day has gone
 So go now, go.
 Day has gone.³⁴

Similarly, Abd al-Sabur uses the interior monologue. In his poem "Muthakkirat

³³Ali Abdalridha, *Al-Ustura fi Shir Al-Sayyab* [Myth in Al-Sayyab's Poetry] (Iraq: Ministry of Culture and Arts, 1978) 100-101.

³⁴Translated by Adnan Haydar and Michael Beard, 28/08/2010
 <http://www.banipal.co.uk/selections/19/138/badr_shakir_al-sayyab/>.

al-Sufi Bishr al-Hafi” [Memoirs of the Sufi Bishr al-Hafi] Abd al-Sabur utilizes the historical mask of the Sufi:

شيخى "بسام الدين" يقول :

"يا بشر . . اصبر

دنيانا أجمل مما تذكر

ها أنت ترى الدنيا من قمة وجدك

لا تبصرا الا الانقراض السوداء"

My Sheikh “Bassam Addin” says:

“Oh Bishr . . Be patient

Our world is lovelier than you mention

You view the world

But you see the black ruins.”³⁵

In several of his poems, Al-Sayyab depicts the deities’ consorts to highlight the myths of fertility and rain in the figures of the Babylonian ‘Tammuz’, and ‘Ishtar’, the Phrygian ‘Attis’ and ‘Cybele’, the Greek ‘Adonis’ and ‘Aphrodite’ and ‘Persephone’, the Phoenician ‘Baal’ and ‘Anat’, and the Egyptian ‘Osiris’ and ‘Isis’. He also gathers the myths of psychological torture and agony and uses them in his poetry such as ‘Isis’, ‘Oedipus’, ‘Laius’, ‘Tantalus’, ‘Prometheus’, ‘Sisyphus’, ‘Medusa’ ‘Cerberus’ and ‘Sphinx’. Al-Sayyab was familiar with the ancient myths, therefore he utilized along with the aforementioned myths, love romance myths such as ‘Eurydice’ and ‘Orpheus’, ‘Zeus’ and ‘Ganymede’, ‘Apollo’ and ‘Daphne’, ‘Cupid’ and ‘Psyche’, and ‘Narcissus’ who loves his echo. He also employs the myths of sacrifice, sufferings, and struggle and uses

³⁵My translation.

them in the images of 'Messiah', 'Ulysses', 'Sindabad' and 'Ko-ngai'.³⁶ Al-Sayyab attempts to embody the idea of resurrection through 'life-death-rebirth' deities, especially Tammuz. He also refers to other mythical images that symbolize rebirth such as 'Phoenix'. In Al-Sayyab's poetry, the mythical images of death and rebirth were symbols of his rejection of the miserable situation and his criticism of tyrants. Al-Sayyab uses myths of resurrection and growth, to symbolize the hope of amelioration towards a better life. For instance, in his poem "Ru'ya fi Am 1956" [Vision in 1956], Al-Sayyab refers to several mythical and historical figures. 'Zeus', 'Ganymede', 'Tammuz', 'Attis', 'Baal', 'Ishtar', 'Mary', 'Messiah', 'Lazars', 'Judas', 'Genghis Khan', and 'Hafsa':

أيها الصقر الإلهي الغريب
 أيها المنقضى من أولمب في صمت المساء
 رافعا روعي لأطباق السماء
 رافعا روعي - غنميذا جريحا،
 صالبا عيني - تموزا، مسيحا،
 أيها الصقر الإلهي ترفق
 إن روعي تتمزق

 هل يحيا
 جنكيز في بغداد ؟

³⁶In Chinese myths, Ko-ngai was a daughter of Kuan-yu, minister to the Ming Emperor, Yung-lo. Kuan-yu was ordered to cast a giant bell its peals should be heard in every part of the city. After two failed attempts to cast the bell, Emperor Yung-lo threatens to kill Kuan-yu if he fails this time. Kuan-yu's daughter, Ko-ngai, inspired by the fortuneteller that the bell will be cast successfully when blood of a virgin lady is mixed with the melted metals. To save her father, Ko-ngai throws herself into the boiling cauldron. One of Ko-ngai's servants attempts to seize her, but succeeds only in grasping one of her shoes, which came off in his hand. On uncovering the bell after it had cooled, it was found to be perfect. Later on, people used to hear the boom of the bell followed by a low wailing sound like the agonized cry of a woman, and the word *hsieh* (shoe) was distinctly heard, and they say, "There's poor Ko-ngai's voice calling for her shoe".

.....
خالطا فيها يهوذا بالمسيح

.....
عشتار على ساق الشجرة

صلبوها دقوا مسمارا

في بيت الميلاد - الرَّحم.

عشتار بحفصة مستترة

تدعى لتسوق الأمطارا

تدعى لتساق إلى العدم.

عشتار العذراء الشقراء مسيل دم

صلُّوا .. هذا طقس المطر

صلُّوا.. هذا عصر الحجر

صلوا ، بل أصلوها نارا.

تموز تجسّد مسمارا

من حفصة يخرج والشجرة

.....
يا لعشتاراتنا يبيكين تموز القليل .

العازر قام من النعش

Oh, that strange divine falcon

Oh, that swooping from Olympus in the evening silence,

Lifting my soul up to the sky layers

Lifting my soul-that is the wounded Ganymede,

Crucifying my easy-that is the Christ Tammuz

Oh, divine falcon be kind to me

My soul is ripping.

.....

Does Genghis lives in Baghdad?

.....

Mixing Judas with Messiah

.....

Ishtar is on a trunk of the tree

They crucified her,

Hammered a nail in the womb.

Within Hafsa³⁷ Ishtar is hidden,

She is called to carry the rain,

She is called to be driven to death

The blonde virgin Ishtar is my bloodshed

Pray.. This is a ritual for rain

Pray.. This is the stone age

Pray not, they set fire to her

Tammuz embodied as a nail

From Hafsa and the tree it emerges

.....

Oh, our Ishtars, they weep for killed Tammuz.

Lazarus arose from the coffin.³⁸

³⁷ According to Al-Sayyab's notes on this poem, Hafsah is a martyr of al-Mousl massacre in Iraq.

³⁸ My translation.

Al-Sayyab creates the technique of integrating the myths.³⁹ For example, in his poem “Cerberus in Babel”, Al-Sayyab conflates the Greek deities ‘Adonis’ and ‘Aphrodite’, the Babylonian deities ‘Ishtar’ and ‘Tammuz’, and the Egyptian deities ‘Osiris’ and ‘Isis’. In Al-Sayyab’s poem “Cerberus in Babel”, ‘Cerberus’ symbolizes British colonization as well as dictatorial regimes in Iraq. Cerberus also symbolizes the punishments, sufferings and prisons in Iraq. Tammuz symbolizes the Iraqi people and Ishtar symbolizes the revolution. In this poem, Al-Sayyab merges the Babylonian deities ‘Tammuz’ and ‘Ishtar’ and the Egyptian deities ‘Osiris’ and ‘Isis’. He gives the features of ‘Osiris’ who was cut by his brother ‘Set’ to ‘Tammuz’; and Ishtar becomes Isis who was devoted to her husband and travels everywhere to collect his dispersed flesh and reassembles the pieces of her dead husband and miraculously, brings him back to life:

ليعو سربروس في الدروب

في بابل الحزينة المهدامة

.....

ليعو سربروس في الدروب

و ينبش التراب عن إلها الدفين

تموزنا الطعين

.....

و أقبلت إلهة الحصاد ،

رفيقة الزهور و المياه و الطيوب ،

عشتار ربّة الشمال و الجنوب ،

تسير في السهول و الوهاد

³⁹Ali Abdalridha, *Al-Usturah Fi Shir Al-Sayyab* [The Myth in Al-Sayyab’s Poetry] (Iraq: Ministry of Culture and Arts, 1978).

تسير في الدروب
تلقط منها لحم تموز إذا انتثر ،
تلمه في سله كأنه الثمر .

Let Cerberus howl in the paths

In drab ruined Babel

.....

Let Cerberus growl in the routes

And exhume our buried god

That is our stabbed Tammuz

.....

Goddess of harvest came,

She is a companion of flowers, water and scent,

Ishtar, the goddess of the north and south,

Hikes in the plains and lowlands

Hikes in the routes

Picks up flesh of Tammuz that were strewn

She gathers it in a basket like fruits.⁴⁰

In the following lines Al-Sayyab portrays Ishtar to be like Adonis, who was killed by a wild boar where his blood tinged the white roses to become red (anemone). Al-Sayyab also portrays Adonis to be like Aphrodite, who was born from the blood of Uranus. In the same context, Al-Sayyab makes Adonis to be like Osiris whose flesh gathers again:

ليعو سربروس في الدروب

⁴⁰My translation.

لينهش الألهة الحزينة ، الألهة المروعة ؛
 فإن من دمائها ستخضب الحبوب ،
 سينبت الإله ، فالشرائح الموزعة
 تجمعت ؟ تملمت . سيولد الضياء
 من رحم ينزّ بالدماء.

Let Cerberus howl in the paths
 Let it gnaw the sad goddess, the terrified goddess,
 That from her blood, grains will be tinged,
 God will sprout, and the scattered steaks gathered
 From a womb that seeps blood, lightness will be born.⁴¹

In his poem “Al-Awdah li Jaikur” [Return to Jaikur] Al-Sayyab integrates the Greek myth of ‘Prometheus’ and the myth of Crucifixion of Jesus:

من الذي يسمع اشعاري؟
 فإن صمت الموت في داري
 والليل في ناري.
 من الذي يحمل عبء الصليب
 في ذلك الليل الطويل الرهيب؟
 من الذي يبكي و من يستجيب
 للجائع العاري ؟
 من ينزل المصلوب عن لوحه؟
 من يطرد العقبان عن جرحه؟
 من يرفع الظلماء عن صبحه؟
 و يبذل الأشواك بالغار؟

⁴¹Ibid.

Who will hear my poems
 when death's silence dwells inside my home,
 when night settles in my fire?
 Who will lift the burden of my cross
 in this long night of dread?
 Who would cry out, who would answer to the hungry,
 care for the destitute?
 Who would lower Jesus from His cross,
 who would drive the vultures from His wounds,
 remove the lid of darkness from His dawn?
 Who would replace His thorns with a crown⁴² of laurels?⁴³

In the above-lines, Al-Sayyab refers to the crucifixion of Jesus and compares his endurance to that of Jesus. Then he mingles the suffering of the crucified Jesus on the cross with the sufferings of 'Prometheus', who was bound to a rock while an eagle devours his liver.

In the following lines, Al-Sayyab employs the religious Christian symbol: 'Jesus crucifixion'. In many of his poems, Al-Sayyab utilizes the image of crucifixion not to highlight the religious purport of Christianity, but to exploit the image of agony and endurance. Al-Sayyab attempts to benefit from the historical, religious, literary and mythical symbols. Therefore, Al-Sayyab's poems are swarming with Islamic, Christian and mythical symbols. Al-Sayyab presents the Babylonian goddess Ishtar negatively.

⁴²Al-Sayyab mentioned in his footnotes of this poem that they mockingly dressed Jesus a crown of thorns.

⁴³Translated by Adnan Haydar and Michael Beard,
 28/ 08/ 2010 <http://www.banipal.co.uk/selections/19/138/badr_shakir_al-sayyab/>.

Though she is the goddess of fertility and motherhood, she cannot even quench herself
with water and as she dies of thirst:

غدا سيصلب المسيح في العراق

ستأكل الكلاب من دم البراق

.....

و أقبل الصيف علينا أسود الغيوم

.....

خيّل للجياح أنّ ربّة الزّهر

عشتار قد أعادت الأسير للبشر

و كللت جبينه الغضير بالثمر

خيّل للجياح أنّ كاهل المسيح

أزاح عن مدفنه الحجر

فسار يبعث الحياة في الضّريح

و يرى الأبرص أو يجدّد البصر

.....

وفي القرى تموت

عشتار عطشى ليس في جبينها زهر

Tomorrow, Christ will be crucified

In Iraq, and the dogs will feast

On the blood of Buraq.

.....

Wrapped round in gore; now summer

Is upon us with black clouds

.....

Then will it seem to the hungry that Ishtar,
 The goddess of flowers, has brought back the captive
 To mankind, And crowned his lush forehead with fruit?
 Then will it seem to the hungry that shoulder
 Of Christ has rolled back the stone from the tomb
 Has set out to resurrect life from the grave
 And cure the leper or make the blind to see

And in the village Ishtar is dying of thirst,
 And there are no flowers on her forehead.⁴⁴

In his poem “Marha Ghailan” [Well Done Ghailan], Al-Sayyab applies his technique of mixing the myths. In the following lines, Al-Sayyab depicts himself as the Babylonian god of fertility and growth, Tammuz who pours his blood to irrigate the palm trees. In the same context, Al-Sayyab portrays himself as the Phoenician deity of rain, crops and fertility ‘Baal’ who gives life to the leaves and fruits. Then Al-Sayyab claims that he struggles like Sisyphus:

أنا في قرار بويب أرقد ، في فراش من رماله ،
 من طينه المعطور ، و الدم من عروقي في زلاله
 ينثال كي يهب الحياة لكل أعراق النخيل .
 أنا بعل : أخطر في الجليل ...
 على المياه ، أنت في الورقات روعي و الثمار

⁴⁴These lines are taken from Al-Sayyab’s poem “Madinat al-Sindabad” [The City of Sindabad], translated by Mounah A. Khouri and Hamid Algar. *An Anthology of Modern Arabic Poetry* (California: California UP, 1974) 99- 103.

.....
يا سلم الأنعام ، أئمة رغبة هي في قرارك ؟
"سيزيف" يرفعها فتسقط للحضيض مع انهيارك .

At bottom of Buwaib⁴⁵ I lie
On a bed of its sand, on its scented mud.
And the blood from my veins is
Disgorging into its freshwater, so as to
Resuscitate all palms' roots.
I am Baal: who walks on water,
Whose soul diffuses into the leaves and the fruits.

.....
Oh musical ladder, which desire is in your mind?
Sisyphus rolls it uphill, then it rolls
Downhill along with your collapse.⁴⁶

The following lines are taken from Al-Sayyab's poem "Ru'ya fi Am 1956"
[Vision in 1956]. These lines also display Al-Sayyab's technique of blending myths.⁴⁷ He
employs the Phrygian god 'Attis' and the Greek god 'Adonis' interchangeably:

تموز هذا ، أتيس
هذا ، و هذا الربيع .
يا خبزنا يا أتيس ،
أنبت لنا الحب و أحي اليبس

⁴⁵Buwaib is a river in Al-Sayyab's village Jaikur.

⁴⁶My translation.

⁴⁷Ali Abdalrida, *Al-Usturah fi She'r Al-Sayyab* [The Myth in Al-Sayyab's Poetry] (Iraq: Ministry of Culture and Arts, 1978).

This is Tammuz, this is Attis,

And this is the spring.

Oh, Attis thy are our bread

For us grow the seeds and revive the drought land.⁴⁸

The following lines are taken from Al-Sayyab's poem "Jaikur W-al-Madinah"
[Jaikur and The City] in which Al-Sayyab laments Tammuz, whose mother 'Lat' grieves
him:

و كرم من عساليجه العاقرات شرايين تموز عبر المدينة

شرايين في كل دار و سجن و مقهى

و سجن و بار و في كل ملهى

و في كل مستشفيات المجانين

في كل مبغى لعشتار

يطلعن أزهارهن الهجينة

.....
و تموز تبكيه لاة الحزينة

Here are vineyards, their deed springs

Veins of Tammuz crossing the city, veins

that branch through every home and prison,

every coffee bar,

Through all the insane asylums,

Every whorehouse of Ishtar,

Ignoble flowers

.....

⁴⁸My translation.

And the goddess Lat grieves for Tammuz.⁴⁹

The following lines are taken from Al-Sayyab's poem "Tammuz Jaikur" [Tammuz of Jaikur]. In these lines, Al-Sayyab becomes Tammuz and the wild boar goes him to death, but his blood will not become anemones like Tammuz's:

ناب الخنزير يشقّ يدي
و يغوص لظاه إلى كبدي ،
و دمي يتدفق، ينساب :
لم يغد شقائق أو قمحا
لكنّ ملحا .

Boar's tusk rends my hand,
And his blaze dives into my liver,
And my blood become neither anemones⁵⁰ nor wheat,
But, salt.⁵¹

Al-Sayyab is one of the Tammuzian poets⁵² who often exploit the myth of Tammuz in their poems. Therefore, the myth of 'Tammuz' or its counterparts 'Adonis', 'Attis', 'Osiris' and 'Baal' are present in many of Al-Sayyab's poems. The following lines are taken from Al-Sayyab's poem "Ughniya fi Shahr Aab" [Song in August] Al-Sayyab vocalizes the death of Tammuz, implying the absence of willpower to revolt among the Iraqi:

⁴⁹Translated by Lena Jayyusi and Christopher Middleton, Salma Khadra Jayyusi, ed, *Modern Arabic Poetry: An Anthology* (New York: Columbia University Press) 434.

⁵⁰According to the Greek myths, Red anemones sprang have sprung from the blood of Adonis who was killed by Mars or the boar. In another version of the story, the anemones were white before the death of Adonis, whose blood turned them red.

⁵¹My translation.

⁵²'Tammuzian poets' is a term given by Jabra Ibrahim Jabra to the Arab poets who dealt with the myth of Tammuz excessively. They are Badr Shaker Al-Sayyab, Khalil Hawi, Yusuf al-Khal and Adonis (Ali Ahmed Said).

تموز يموت في الافق
وتغور دماه مع الشفق
في الكهف المعتم ، والظلماء
نقالة اسعاف سوداء
وكان الليل قطيع نساء :
كحل وعباءات سود
الليل خباء
الليل نهار مسدود

Tammuz dies on the skyline,
His blood seeps away with twilight
In the dim cavern. Darkness
Is a black ambulance,
Night a flock of women:
Kohl, black cloaks.
Night, an enormous tent.
Night, a blocked day.⁵³

The following lines are taken from Al-Sayyab's poem "Qasidah ila al-Iraq al-Tha'er" [An Ode To Revolutionary Iraq] in which Al-Sayyab celebrates the rebirth of Tammuz, while in the previous lines Al-Sayyab laments the death of Tammuz. In these lines, Al-Sayyab celebrates the revolution, greets the army, and announces that Tammuz has risen:

مرحى لجيش الأمة العربية انتزع الوثاق !

⁵³Translated by Lena Jayyusi and Christopher Middleton, Salma Khadra Jayyusi, ed, *Modern Arabic Poetry: An Anthology* (New York: Columbia University Press) 430-431.

يا أخوتي بالله ، بالدم ، بالعروبة ، بالرجاء ،
 هبّوا فقد صرع الطغاة و بدّد الليل الضياء !
 فلتحرسوها ثورة عربيّة صعق الرّفاق
 منها وخر الظالمون ،
 لأن تموز استفاق
 من بعد ما سرق العميل سناه ، فانبعث العراق

Rejoice! The army of the Arab nation has torn off the bonds,
 O my brethren in God, in blood, in Arabism, in hope,
 Arise, for tyrants are laid low,
 And light has dispelled the night.
 Guard well the Arab revolution
 That crushed the “comrades”, cast down the oppressors,
 For Tammuz, his splendor once stolen by the traitor,
 Has arisen, and Iraq is reborn.⁵⁴

The following lines are taken from Al-Sayyab's poem “Madina Bila Matar” [City without Rain]. Al-Sayyab heralds the impending rebirth of Tammuz, and by implication, Al-Sayyab envisages a revolution in Iraq:

مدينتنا تؤرّق ليلها نار بلا لهب .
 تحمّ دروبها و الدّور ، ثم تزول حمّاها
 و يصبغها الغروب بكل ما حملته من سحب
 فتوشك أن تطير شرارة و يهب موتاها :
 "صحا من نومه الطينيّ تحت عرائش العنب

⁵⁴Translated by Mounah A. Khouri and Hamid Algar, *An Anthology of Modern Arabic Poetry* (California: University of California Press) 93.

صحا تموز ، عاد لبابل الخضراء يرعاها."

و توشك أن تدق طبول بابل ثم يغشاها.

صفير الريح في أبراجها و أنين مرضاها.

وفي غرفات عشتار

تظل مجامر الفخار خاوية بلا نار

A fire with no flames keeps our City awake at night.

Its lanes and houses have fever. When the fever goes

And sunset colors it with all the clouds it carried,

A spark is about to fly, its dead are about to rise:

"Tammuz has awakened from his muddy sleep under the grape bowers,

Tammuz has awakened, returned to green Babel to care for it".

The drums of Babel are about to beat, but through its castles

The wind's whistle and the moan of its sick predominate

In the chambers of Astarte

The earthenware censers remain empty with no fire.⁵⁵

In some of his poems, Al-Sayyab refers to the motif of the mythical rebirth without mentioning explicitly the names of the fertility deities (Tammuz and Adonis) as in his poem "Al-Nahr wa Al-Mawt" [The River and Death]:

أود لو غرفت في دمي إلى القرار ،

لأحمل العبء مع البشر

وأبعث الحياة . إن موتي انتصار !

I wish I could drown in my blood

To share humanity's burden

⁵⁵Translated by Issa J. Boullata, *Modern Arab Poets 1950-1975* (London: Heinemann, 1976) 3.

And bring back life. My death is a victory!⁵⁶

Similarly, in his poem “Madinat al-Sindabad” [The City of Sindabad] Al-Sayyab embodies the motif of ‘rebirth through death’ to himself as well as the Iraqi people:

نود لو ننام من جديد

نود لو نموت من جديد

فنومنا براعم انتباه

وموتنا يخبي الحياة

We should like to sleep again,

We should like to die again,

And with our sleep will be buds of awareness,

And our death will conceal life.⁵⁷

In his poem “Madinat al-Sindabad” [City of Sindabad], Al-Sayyab ironically, wonders where the rain and corps are. Al-Sayyab wonders whether Adonis is really the deity of fertility and growth; there is nothing in Iraq, but drought and barrenness. Al-Sayyab implies that revolution in Iraq is still difficult. Therefore, Al-Sayyab attempts to instigate the Iraqi people to revolt and show their heroism:

أهذا أدونيس ، هذا الحواء

و هذا الشحوب ، و هذا الجفاف؟

أهذا أدونيس ؟ أين الضياء ؟

و أين القطاف ؟

مناجل لا تحصد ،

أزاهر لا تعقد ،

⁵⁶Translated by Abdullah al-Udhari, *Modern Poetry of the Arab World* (Middlesex: Penguin, 1986) 33.

⁵⁷Translated by Mounah A. Khouri and Hamid Algar, *An Anthology of Modern Arabic Poetry* (California: University of California Press) 95.

مزارع سوداء من غير ماء !
 أهذا انتظار السنين الطويلة ؟
 أهذا صراخ الرجولة ؟
 أهذا أنين النساء ؟
 أودنيس يا لاندحار البطولة .

Is this Adonis, this emptiness?
 And this pallor, this dryness?
 Is this Adonis? Where is the glow?
 And where is the harvest?
 The sickles are not reaping,
 The flowers are nit blooming,
 The black fields have no water!
 Is this the expectation of so many years?
 Is this the shout of manhood?
 Is this the moan of women?
 Adonis! Behold the defeat of heroism!⁵⁸

In Al-Sayyab's poetry, the myth of fertility and rebirth tops the list of myths that he used in his poems specifically the myth of Tammuz and Ishtar. In his poem "Ila Jamila Bouhired" [To Jamila Bouhired] Al-Sayyab says:

عشتار أم الخصب ، و الحب ، و الإحسان ، تلك الربّة الوالهة
 لم تعط ما أعطيت لم ترو بالأمطار ما روّيت قلب الفقير

Ishtar, a mother of fertility, love and

⁵⁸Translated by Mounah A. Khouri and Hamid Algar, *An Anthology of Modern Arabic Poetry* (California: University of California Press) 95-97.

charity, that infatuated goddess is.

She hasn't afforded as you have

And hasn't quenched the land as you

have quenched the poor's heart.⁵⁹

In his poem "Tammuz Jaikur" [Tammuz of Jaikur] Al-Sayyab displays himself as Tammuz and Ishtar as his wife:

"عشتار" ... و تخفق أثواب

و ترف حيالي أعشاب

.....

لو أن عروقي أعناب

و تقبل ثغري عشتار

Ishtar... and clothes flutter

And herbs wave towards me.

.....

Would that my veins were vines,

And that Ishtar kisses my lips⁶⁰

In his poem "Madinah Bila Matar" [A City without Rain] Al-Sayyab says:

و في غرفات عشتار

تظل مجامر الفخار خاوية بلا نار

.....

عذارانا حزاني ذاهلات حول عشتار

يغيض الماء شيئاً بعد شيء من محياها ،

⁵⁹My translation.

⁶⁰Ibid.

وغصناً بعد غصن تذبل الكرمة.

In the chambers of Astarte

The earthenware censers remain empty with no fire.

.....

Our virgins are sad and listless around Astarte

As water dries up bit by bit in her face,

And branch after branch the vine withers.⁶¹

In his poem "Marha Ghailan" [Well Done Ghailan] Al-Sayyab says:

تموز عاد بكل سنبله تعابث كل ريح.

.....

عشتار فيها دون بعل

و الموت يركض في شوارعها و يهتف : يا نيام

هبوا، فقد ولد الظلام

Tammuz has returned with every ear of grain

that plays with every wind.

.....

Ishtar (in Jaikur) is without husband

And in its streets, death runs and calls: oh

sleepers, wake up, darkness was born.⁶²

Al-Sayyab refers to Persephone as the goddess of fertility and love. In his poem "Umm al-Brom", Al-Sayyab says:

يقول رفيقي السكران : " دعها تأكل الموتى

⁶¹Translated by Issa J. Boullata. *Modern Poetry of the Arab World* (Middlesex: Penguin, 1986) 3.

⁶²My translation.

مدينتنا لتكبر تحضن الأحياء تسقينا

شرابا من حدائق برسفون

My drunken companion says: Let our city eats the

Dead, to get larger, to hug the alive, to give us

A drink, made from gardens of Persephone⁶³

Al-Sayyab also refers to 'Persephone' in his poem "Al-Umm wa-al-Tifla al-Dhaeh"

[Mother and the Lost Child]:

منى روعي ، ابنتي : عودي إليّ فيها هو الزاد

و هذا الماء .

.....

كانك برسفون تخطفتها قبضة الوحش

Oh, my soul desires oh, my daughter: return to me,

here are the comestibles and water.

.....

Thou are like Persephone that has been whisked by the monster.⁶⁴

The love myths in Al-Sayyab's poems do not convey Al-Sayyab's love neither do they amuse the reader, but they encapsulate the idea by offering mythical symbols, which make the poems unique.

The following lines, which are drawn from Al-Sayyab's poem "Ru'ya fi Am 1956" [Vision in 1956] refer to the Olympian god 'Zeus' and the young winsome prince 'Ganymede'. According to the Greek myths, 'Zeus' loves 'Ganymede' and comes in the form of an eagle to abduct him:

⁶³Ibid.

⁶⁴Ibid.

أيها الصقر الإلهي الغريب
 أيها المنقض من أولمب في صمت المساء
 رافعا روحي لأطباق السماء
 رافعا روحي - غنميذا جريحا،

Oh, that strange divine eagle
 Oh, that swooping from Olympus in the evening silence,
 Lifting my soul up to the sky layers
 Lifting my soul-that is the wounded Ganymede⁶⁵

In the following lines of Al-Sayyab's poem "Al-Mabad al-Ghareeq" [The Sunken Temple], he alludes to the 'Zeus' and 'Ganymede' myth by mentioning the mountain, eagles and wine. According to Greek myths, 'Zeus' abducts 'Ganymede' to be his beloved and serve as a cupbearer to the Gods in the Olympus mount:

هَلَمْ فَمَا يَزَالُ زِيُوسُ يَصْبِغُ قَمَّةَ الْجَبَلِ
 بِخَمْرَتِهِ وَ يَرْسِلُ أَلْفَ نَسْرٍ نَزَلَ مِنْ أَحْدَاقِهَا الشَّرَرُ

Let us go, Zeus still tinges the peak of the mount
 With his wine; and send a thousand of eagles
 That eyes exude the evils.⁶⁶

In his poem "Al-Sha'ir al-Rajeem" [The Cursed Poet], which is dedicated to the French poet Charles Baudelaire, nicknamed "the cursed poet", Al-Sayyab indicates the mythical figure Narcissus who is, according to the Greek mythology, a handsome youth who falls in love with his own image that reflects in the water:

كَأَنَّ سَافُو أَوْرَثَتْكَ مِنَ الْعُرُوقِ نَارَ

⁶⁵My translation.

⁶⁶Ibid.

وأنت لا تضم غير حلمك الأبيد
 كمن يضم طيفه المطل من زجاج :
 حرقه نرسيس

It seems that Sappho⁶⁷ bequeathed you fire
 And you merely embrace your eternal dream
 Like that who hugs his shadow that overlooked from a glass:
 Like burning of Narcissus⁶⁸

The following lines refer to the love in the 'Orpheus' myth. In Greek mythology, 'Orpheus' was the husband of 'Eurydice' whom he loved dearly. 'Eurydice' died of snakebite. As 'Orpheus' was renowned for his legendary voice, he goes to the underworld to sing and amuse the underworld god 'Hades' in order to bring his wife back. Al-Sayyab never relates the mythical story in his poems. He merely hints to the figures which are either pertinent to love and fertility myths or they are pertinent to the myths of agony, sufferings and struggle. The following lines are taken from Al-Sayyab's poem "Dar Jaddi" [My Grandfather's Home] in which Al-Sayyab hints to the love myth of 'Orpheus' and 'Eurydice':

كأنّ مقلتي ، بل كأنني انبعثت (أورفيوس)
 تمصّه الخرائب الهوى إلى الجحيم
 فيلتقي بمقلتيه ، يلتقي بها بيورديس

My eyeballs, rather me is seemingly Orpheus
 That ruins absorb to the hell
 Where he meets Eurydice⁶⁹

⁶⁷Sappho is an ancient Greek poet. She was born in the island of Lesbos.

⁶⁸My translation.

The following lines are taken from Al-Sayyab's poem "Al-Mumis Al-Amya" [The Blind Harlot]. In these lines Al-Sayyab hints at the myths of 'Apollo' and 'Daphne', a daughter of the god river. Al-Sayyab also refers to the arrows of love which is called in Greek myths as golden arrows of Cupid:

سيظل غاصبها يطاردها وتلفظها البيوت
ستظل – ما دامت سهام التبر تصفر في الهواء –
تعدو ، ويتبعها " أبولو " من جديد كالقضاء ،

Her rapist will keep chasing her, and homes to shelter.

As long as the golden arrows⁷⁰ whistle in the air,

She will keep running, and like the fate, Apollo traces her again.⁷¹

In Al-Sayyab's poem "Marthiyat Jaikur" [Elegy on Jaikur], he employs al-Anqa'a [Phoenix] (the legendary bird in Greek, Roman, and Egyptian mythologies).

أهو هذا الذي يريدون ؟ أشلاء و أنقاض منزل مهدود؟
أفما قامت الحضارات في الأرض كعنقاء من رماد اللحد؟

Is that what they want? Limbs and ruins of a wrecked house?

Haven't civilizations emerged in the earth?

Like a Phoenix from the grave ashes⁷²

In Al-Sayyab's poem "Shubbak Wafiqa" [Wafiqa's Window], he uses the Greek myth Icarus:

ايكار يمسح بالشمس

⁶⁹My translation.

⁷⁰According to Greek myth, Apollo loves Daphne because of Cupid, who carries golden and leaden arrows that excite love and hate. Cupid maliciously, strikes Apollo's hear with the golden arrow and he strikes Daphne's heart with the leaden arrow. Apollo loves her, attempts to obtain her, and begins to chases her.

⁷¹My translation.

⁷²Ibid.

ريشات النسـر و ينطلق ،

ايكار تلقفه الافق

ورماه إلى اللجج الرمس

Icarus⁷³ mops the sun,

With eagle's feathers, then it dashes,

And has been thrown to the depth of sea.⁷⁴

In his poem “Al-Awdah li Jaikur” [Return to Jaikur], Al-Sayyab hints at the Greek myth ‘Prometheus’, who is chained to a rock and every day an eagle comes to devour his liver. According to the Greek legend, ‘Prometheus’s liver is grows back to be eaten for eternity. Al-Sayyab does not mention the name of ‘Prometheus’, but he mentions the vultures instead that claw Prometheus’ body:

من ينزل المصلوب عن لوحه؟

من يطرد العقبان عن جرحه؟

من يرفع الظلماء عن صبحه؟

و يبذل الأشواك بالغار؟

Who would lower Jesus from His cross?

Who would drive the vultures from His wounds?

Remove the lid of darkness from His dawn?

Who would replace His thorns with a crown⁷⁵ of laurels?

In his poem “Risalah min Maqbarah” [A Message from a Graveyard] Al-Sayyab explicitly refers to the myth of Sisyphus and his rock. According to the Greek myth,

⁷³In Greek myths, Icarus is the son of Daedalus who escaped from Crete by flying with wings made by Daedalus, Icarus flies so high that the sun's heat melts the wax by which his wings are fastened, and he falls to his death in the sea.

⁷⁴My translation.

⁷⁵Al-Sayyab mentioned in his footnotes of this poem that they mockingly dressed Jesus a crown of thorns.

Sisyphus is tricky and crafty figure. For his artifices, Zeus compels Sisyphus to roll a huge rock to the top of a steep hill, but the rock rolls back down again, forcing Sisyphus to redo the work ceaselessly forever:

وعند بابي يصرخ الخبرون:

"وَعَرَّهُ الْمَرْقَى إِلَى الْجُلْجُلَةِ ،

وَالصَّخْرَ ، يَا سِيزِيفَ ، مَا أَثْقَلَهُ .

سِيزِيفَ .. إِنَّ الصَّخْرَةَ الْآخَرُونَ !"

.....

سِيزِيفَ أَلْقَى عَنْهُ عِبَاءَ الدَّهْورِ

At my door, the informers bawl:

It is bumpy climb to the Golgotha⁷⁶

Oh Sisyphus, what a heavy rock.

Sisyphus.. Verily, rock is the others!

.....

Sisyphus hurled burden of the ages⁷⁷

In his poem "Al-Sha'ir al-Rajeem" [The Cured Poet] Al-Sayyab refers to 'Tantalus', the son of 'Zeus'. According to the Greek myth, Tantalus offends the gods and consequently, he is eternally tantalized with hunger and thirst. Tantalus is immersed in the water up to his neck and when he attempts to drink, water recedes. In addition, there are fruits that hang above his head that remain just out of his reach:

وَأَنْتَ لَا تَضُمُّ غَيْرَ حَلْمِكَ الْأَبِيدِ

كَمَنْ يَضُمُّ طَيْفَهُ الْمَطْلَ مِنْ زَجَاجٍ :

⁷⁶Golgotha or Calvary (in Arabic *Al-Jaljalah*) is name of the mountain where Jesus went to be crucified.

⁷⁷My translation.

حرقة نرسييس و تنتلوس و الثمار!

And you merely embrace your eternal dream

Like that who hugs his towering shadow through a glass:

Like burning of Narcissus, Tantalus, and fruits!⁷⁸

In the following lines of his poem "Al-Mumis Al-Amya" [The Blind Harlot] Al-Sayyab refers to Medusa, Oedipus and Sphinx. Medusa is a beautiful young woman who desecrates Athena's temple by having an intimate relationship with Poseidon inside the temple. As the temple is desecrated, Medusa's beautiful tresses turn into snakes and her eyes are cursed turn anyone whom she looks into stone. Eventually Perseus beheads Medusa. Al-Sayyab also refers to Oedipus, Greek king who unknowingly kills his father, 'Laius' and marries his mother, Jocasta. And when Oedipus discovers that Laius, whom he killed, is his father and that Jocasta is his mother, he gouges out his own eyes and becomes blind:

كعيون "ميدوزا"، تحجر كل قلب بالضغينه،

.....

من هؤلاء العابرون؟

أحفاد "أوديب" الضرير ووارثوه المبصرون.

جوكست أرملة كأمس ، وباب "طيبة" ما يزال

يلقي "أبو الهول" الرهيب عليه ، من رعب ظلال

Like the eyes of "Medusa", every heart

turns to a stone (because of rancor)

.....

Who are these passersby?

⁷⁸Ibid.

Progenies of the blind “Oedipus” and his
sighted inheritors are.

Jocasta, a widow like yesterday she is,

And upon the gate of Thebes, the terrifying

“Sphinx”⁷⁹ still casts a shadow of terror⁸⁰

The following lines are taken from Al-Sayyab’s poem “Rahal al-Nahar” [Day has gone]. In these lines, Sindabad symbolizes Al-Sayyab himself and his wife who awaits his return. Al-Sayyab wrote this poem when he was in Beirut for treatment. This poem reveals Al-Sayyab’s personal emotions. Here the persona is someone telling Sindbad’s wife to go home because Sindbad will not be back. Sindbad is a mask for Al-Sayyab himself and his wife’s monologue is: ‘He will come back’. ‘No’. ‘His ship has sunk down to the bottom of the ocean’. As Al-Sayyab was informed that he has an incurable disease, he highlights the worry of his wife:

و جلست تنتظرين عودة سندباد من السفار

و البحر يصرخ من ورائك بالعواصف و الرعود ،

هو لن يعود ،

أو ما علمت بأنه أسرته الهة البحار

في قلعة سواء في جزر من الدم والمحار.

هو لن يعود ،

رحل النهار

⁷⁹In the Greek mythologies, the Greek city, Thebes was afflicted with a monster that had a body of a lion and a head of a woman called Sphinx. Sphinx lives on a rock at the gate of Thebes and terrifies the people. Sphinx poses a riddle to any passerby and devours who is unable to solve the riddle. Eventually, Oedipus comes and answers her riddle correctly. Hearing Oedipus' answer, Sphinx throws herself from the high rock and dies.

⁸⁰My translation.

فلترحلي ، هو لن يعود.

.....

و جلست تنتظرين هائمة الخواطر في دوار:

"سيعود . لا . غرق السفين من المحيط إلى القرار

سيعود . لا . حجزته صارخة العواصف في إيسار

يا سندباد ، أما تعود ؟"

And here you sit, waiting

For Sindbad to return.

Behind you, the sea cries out

In tempests, in thunder.

He will not return.

Didn't you know that the deities of the sea

have imprisoned him in a black castle,

In islands of blood and oysters

He will not return.

Day has gone

So go now, go.

He will not be back.

.....

And here you sat waiting,

dazed, with whirling thoughts:

"He will come back. No, his ship has gone down headlong.

He will come back. No, the wailing winds have detained him.

O Sindbad, will you ever come back?”⁸¹

In his poem “Al-Mabad al-Ghareeq” [The Sunken Temple] Al-Sayyab refers to the Greek king Ulysses or Odysseus⁸² myth. In the following lines Al-Sayyab’s Ulysses does not go back. Like Al-Sayyab’s Sindabad, Al-Sayyab’s Ulysses symbolizes the poet himself who feels that he will die due to his illness:

إذن ما عاد من سفر إلى أهليه عوليس ...
إذن فشراعه الخفاق يزرع فائر الأمواج

Ulysses did not return to his family

His flapped sail is planting stormy waves.⁸³

In his poem “Al- Masih Bad Al-Salb” [Messiah after Crucifixion] Al-Sayyab’s sufferings integrate with the sufferings of Christ. The following lines display Al-Sayyab’s sacrifice for the sake of Iraq:

بعدما أنزلوني ، سمعت الرياح
في نواح طويل تسف النخيل ،

.....

و الصليب الذي سمروني عليه طوال الأصيل

لم تمتني . وانصت : كان العويل

يعبر السهل بيني وبين المدينة.

.....

بعد أن سمروني و ألقيت عيني نحو المدينة

⁸¹Translated by Adnan Haydar and Michael Beard, 29/ 08/ 2010

<http://www.banipal.co.uk/selections/19/138/badr_shakir_al-sayyab/>.

⁸²Ulysses or Odysseus was the Greek king of Ithaca and the hero of Homer’s “Odyssey”. One of the Greek leaders in the Trojan War. After ten years of war, Ulysses burned down Troy and saved Helen. Ulysses had a long journey. He and his men set sail for Ithaca. As he encountered horrible problems, he is known for his voyage adventures.

⁸³My translation.

كدت لا أعرف السهل و السور و المقبرة :

كان شيء ، مدى ما ترى العين،

كالغابة المزهرة،

كان ، في كلّ مرمى ، صليب و أم حزينة .

After they took me down, I heard

the winds, that swing the palm trees with long weep

.....

The cross that they nailed me upon it

Until the late afternoon did not kill me.

And I listen: there was a wail

Crosses the plain between the city and me.

.....

After they nailed me, I cast my eyes over the city

I Barley recognized the plain, the fence and the graveyard:

At the range of vision something was like the flowery forest

In every eyeshot, there was a cross and grieving mother.⁸⁴

Al-Sayyab equates himself with Christ. In his poem “Al-Awdah li Jaikur” [Return to

Jaikur] Al-Sayyab says:

من الذي يحمل عبء الصليب

في ذلك الليل الطويل الرهيب؟

.....

من ينزل المصلوب عن لوحه؟

Who will lift the burden of my cross

⁸⁴My translation.

In this long night of dread?

.....

Who would lower Jesus from His Cross?⁸⁵

Al-Sayyab's poem "Ila Jamila Bouhired" [To Jamila Bouhired] is one of his poems which refer to the sacrifice of Christ. Al-Sayyab dedicates this poem to the Algerian heroine, Jamila Bouhired, who was tortured by the French colonizers. The poet criticizes the Christian colonizers, who mourn the Crucifixion of Christ while they torture Jamila worse than Christ's torture:

مشبوحة الأطراف فوق الصليب

مشبوحة العينين عبر الظلام

.....

يا أختنا المشبوحة الباكية ،

أطرافك الدامية

يقطرن في قلبي و يبكين فيه .

لم يلق ما تلقين أنت المسيح .

She is spreadeagled on the cross

Her eyes spread out the dark.

.....

Oh, our spreadeagled, weeping sister,

Thy bleeding limbs,

In my heart are dripping and crying.

Messiah confronted not as thou do.⁸⁶

⁸⁵Translated by Adnan Haydar and Michael Beard, 29/ 08/ 2010
<http://www.banipal.co.uk/selections/19/138/badr_shakir_al-sayyab/>.

In his poem “Fi al-Maghreb al-Arabi” [In the Arab Maghreb] Al-Sayyab refers to ‘the sacrilegious use made of the passions of the Christ by the Paris harlots’⁸⁷:

وفي باريس تتخذ البغايا
وسائدهن من ألم المسيح

The whores of Paris

Make their pillow from Christ’s agony⁸⁸

The following lines are taken from Al-Sayyab’s poem “Gharib Ala al-Khalij” [A Stranger by the Gulf] in which Al-Sayyab longs for his country, Iraq. Therefore, Al-Sayyab’s compares his sufferings of expatriation with that of Christ:

واحسرتاه ، متى أنام
فأحسّ أن على الوسادة
من ليلك الصيفي طلاً فيه عطرك يا عراق ؟
بين القرى المتهيبات خطاي و المدن الغريبة
غنيت تربتك الحبيبة
وحملتها فأنا المسيح يجرّ في المنفى صليبه

What a pity . . . when will I sleep

And sense on the pillow

Your summer night--gilded by your perfume, Iraq?

Between timid villages and strange cities, my footsteps

I sang your beloved soil

And I carried it--for I am the Messiah in exile dragging his cross.⁸⁹

⁸⁶My translation.

⁸⁷“Rewriting The Waste Land: Badr Shakir Al-Sayyab’s Fi Al-Maghrib Al-Arabi”, *Journal of Arabic Literature*, Vol. XXX, (Leiden: Brill 1999), 128-170.

⁸⁸Translated by Lena Jayyusi and Christopher Middleton, *Modern Arabic Poetry: An Anthology* (New York: Columbia UP, 1987) 440.

In his poem “Marthiyyat Jaikur” [An Elegy for Jaikur] Al-Sayyab addresses the cross of Christ:

يا صليب المسيح ألقاك ظلا
فوق جيکور طائر من حديد
يا لظل كظلمة القبر في اللون و كالقبر في ابتلاع الخدود
و التهام العيون من كل عذراء كعذراء بيت لحم الولود

Oh, Messiah's cross, I meet thee
over Jaikur like a shadow, like a bird of iron.
What a shadow like a darkness of a grave and
like a grave when it swallows the cheeks, and
the eyes of every virgin.⁹⁰

In his poem “Marha Ghailan” [Well Done Ghailan], Al-Sayyab hopes to be cured from his illness and therefore he imagines that his son calls him and heralds that the Christ has come to revive him:

"بابا ... " كأن يد المسيح
فيها ، كأن جماجم الموتى تبرعم في الضريح .

“Papa...” Messiah's hand seemingly to be there,
Dead skulls seemingly, bud in the tomb.⁹¹

Through the aforementioned examples are drawn from several poems of Al-Sayyab's collection, the study aims to highlight Al-Sayyab's technique of utilizing the mythical figures that do not offer an explication of the texts. Salma Khadra Jayyusi, in

⁸⁹Translated by Shareah Taleghani, 29/08/ 2010 < <http://www.jehat.com/Jehaat/en/Poets/BadrShakirAl-Sayyab.htm>>.

⁹⁰My translation.

⁹¹Ibid.

her book *Trends and Movements in Modern Arabic Poetry* states:

Al-Sayyab was able to Arabize almost all the myths he used. Christ and the Cross became, in his hands, a part of a human heritage no less Arab than anything else. In this, he was more successful than several other poets of his generation, whose adoption of themes, motifs and modes hitherto not used in poetry, was often full of affectation and lacked the mark of true experience. (Jayyusi 739)

Unlike Al-Sayyab, Salah Abd al-Sabur does not indulge in the world of myths. Instead, Abd al-Sabur employs the historical figures and symbols. In several of his poems, Al-Sayyab employs the myths of death and rebirth, but in Abd al-Sabur's poems, myths are rare and implied. In his poem "Al-Shaye Al-Hazeen" [The Sad Object] Abd al-Sabur alludes to the myth of rebirth when he says:

فأنت لو دفنت جثة بأرض
لأورقت جذورها ، وأبنت ثمار

If you have buried a corpse in a ground,
Its root will sprout and will bear fruits.⁹²

In his poem "Ughniyah lil Qahirah" [Song to Cairo] Abd al-Sabur implies the myth of Osiris who was killed, cut into pieces and dispersed in different areas:

وأن يضم النيل والجزائر التي تشقه
والزيت والأوشاب والحجر
عظامي المفتته
على الشوارع المسفلته
على ذرى الأحياء والسكك

⁹²Ibid.

And the Nile and the islands that cleave it
 The oil, the rabble and the stone embrace
 My crumbled bones
 On the asphalted streets,
 On the acme of districts and the rails.⁹³

In the above-lines, Abd al-Sabur does not mention the name of Osiris, but he depicts the scene of his death as the scene of Osiris' end. Like Al-Sayyab, Abd al-Sabur employs the myth of Sphinx, Icarus, Ulysses, and Medusa, In his poem "Awdat thi al-Wajh al-Kaeab" [Returning of the Owner of the Gloomy face] Abd al-Sabur directly mentions the myth of Sphinx:

هذا "أبو الهول" المخيف

نصب السرادق عند باب مدينتي للقادمين

This is terrifying Sphinx

He erected the pavilion at the gate of my city for the comers⁹⁴.

In his poem "Taamulat Lailiyah" [Night Contemplation] Abd al-Sabur refers to the myth of Icarus:

وطرت بين الشمس والسحابة،

And I flew between the sun and the cloud.⁹⁵

In his poem "Al-dhell wa al-Salib" [The Shadow and The Cross] Abd al-Sabur refers to Ulysses when he says:

أنا رجعت من بحار الموت دون موت

I returned from the seas of death without death.⁹⁶

⁹³My translation.

⁹⁴Ibid.

⁹⁵Ibid.

In his poem “Fusul Muntaza'ah” [Elicited Chapters] Abd al-Sabur refers to the myth of Medusa when he says:

أبكي جوهرة

سيدة الجواهر ،

.....

من يدم النظر اليها يرتد ،

اليه النظر المحسور ، ويهوي في قاع النوم المسحور

.....

قد يمسح حجرا ، أو في موضعه يجمد

I weep for a gem,

A mistress of the gems

.....

Who gazes at her,

Upon him, the exhausted sight rebounds,

And it drops at the bottom of the bewitched slumber

.....

He might be transformed into a stone, or at his position freezes.⁹⁷

Abd al-Sabur also alludes to Medusa in his poem “Al-Khuruġ” [Going Out]:

حجارة أكون لو نظرت للوراء

حجارة أصبح أو رجوم

Stones I will be if I looked behind

Stones I become or meteorites.⁹⁸

⁹⁶Ibid.

⁹⁷My translation.

Like Al-Sayyab and the majority of Arab modernist poets, Abd al-Sabur employs the Christian symbols “Cross” and “Messiah” in many of his poems. For instance, in his poem “Ughniyah Li Shitaa” [A Song for Winter] Abd al-Sabur says:

الشعر زلتي التي من أجلها هدمت ما بنيت
من أجلها صليت

Poetry is my slip for which I demolished what I've built

For it, I was crucified.⁹⁹

In his poem “Eid al-Milad Li Sanat 1954” [Christmas for the Year 1954] Abd al-Sabur says:

يا لا هتأ فوق الصليب
يكاد يسألك الصليب
لم مت من دون الصليب

O you who is panting on the cross

The cross is about to ask you

Why you died without the cross.¹⁰⁰

Similarly, in his poem “Ughniyah Khadhra” [A Green Song] Abd al-Sabur compares his suffering to that of Christ's when he says:

أنا مصلوب ، والحب صليبي
وحملت عن الناس الاحزان

I am crucified and the love is my cross

And I have burdened with sorrows for people.¹⁰¹

⁹⁸Ibid.

⁹⁹Ibid.

¹⁰⁰Ibid.

¹⁰¹Ibid.

In his poem “Al-Dhel wa al-Salib” [The Shadow and the Cross] Abd Al-Sabur says:

أنا الذي أحيا بلا أمجاد

أنا الذي أحيا بلا ظل . . . بلا صليب

I who live without glories

I who live without shadow . . . without cross.¹⁰²

¹⁰²Ibid.

CHAPTER FOUR

ARABIC MODERNISM IN PERSPECTIVE: POINTS OF CONVERGENCE AND DEPARTURE

4.1. Arabic and English Literary Modernisms: Common Grounds of Comparison

While English literary modernism is considered a natural yield of philosophic and intellectual modernism in the West, Arabic modernism [*Al-Hadathah*] does not stand on Arabic philosophical and intellectual grounds when compared to Western modernism. The majority of Arabic writings usually deal with literary modernism, and few writings deal with philosophic modernism. In other words a comprehensive and profound meaning of Arabic modernism seems to be defective according to some Arab critics.

Adonis, in his book *An Introduction to Arab Poetics*, identifies many obstacles which affected the development of modern Arabic poetry. The first obstacle is a belief that modernism is directly connected with the present. Adonis argues that poetry cannot be modernist just by being contemporary. The second obstacle, according to Adonis, is 'the desire to be different from the ancient at all costs'; for him modernism is not just to be different from what has happened before. Adonis places the poets of the Abbasid period such as Al-Niffari and Abu Hayyan Al-Tawhidi in the heart of Arabic modernism; and he considers Abu Nuwas more modernist than many contemporary Arab poets. The third obstacle is the belief that the West is the source of modernism, and the belief that modernism outside Western poetry does not exist. The fourth obstacle is to consider prose as a poetic form. Adonis argues that the concentration should be on the substance of poetry and not on its form. He adds that a modernist poet is not one who emphasizes the form and neglects the content because just using meter or free verse cannot create

modernist poetry. The fifth obstacle is the belief that poetic text is modernist only when it treats with contemporary issues. Adonis argues that Arabic modernism does not reflect and respond to the modern age only, but also penetrates into the spirit of the age in order to understand and express it.

The Syrian writer, Sa'd Al-Din Kulaib, in his book *Wa'y Al-Hadathah* [Consciousness of Modernism] says that the rise of Arabic modernism is due to acculturation between Arabs and Westerners which in turn causes technical and thematic renewal in modern Arabic poetry. Sa'd al-Din Kulaib argues that Western literature was required to enrich Arabic aesthetics and not to be imitated. Therefore, acculturation with the West was relatively significant but not essential. Sa'd al-Din Kulaib explicates four characteristics to differentiate modernist poetry from classical poetry: a use of music in the poem, a use of myths, artistic imagery, and vision. He says that vision is the essential element of the modernist poetry. Dr. Kulaib states that aesthetic consciousness forms the basis on which poetic modernism launches.

Western modernism is seen as multilateral, born out of several beliefs and thoughts, while Arabic modernism is unilateral. In his article "The Problematic of European Modernism" Richard Sheppard has enumerated some features of Western literary modernism:

'uncompromising intellectuality', 'a preoccupation with nihilism', 'a discontinuity', 'an interaction to the Dionysiac', 'a formalism', an attitude of detachment', 'the use of myth as an arbitrary means of ordering art and reflexivism', 'an anti-democratic cast of mind', an emphasis on subjectivity', 'a feeling of alienation and loneliness', 'the sense on the

ever-present threat of chaos, ... in conjunction with the sense of search' and 'the experience of panic terror', 'a particular form of irony which derives from the rift between self and world', 'consciousness, observation and detachment' and 'a commitment to metaphor as the very essence of the poetry itself. (Giles 2)

From a literary perspective, there are some common characteristics between Arabic and English literary modernisms. Arab and English modernist poets see the world as fragmented multiculturalism with meaningless life. New themes such as anxiety, alienation from society, loneliness, wasteland or unreal city, and the fear of death are the dominant themes of Arabic and English modernist poetry. Though, modernist poets assert that poetry should use the everyday language of people, Arabic and English modernist texts are usually obscure and abstruse due to allusion and excessive use of symbols as well as other factors such as the wide epistemology, philosophy, metaphysics, mysticism, and mythology. Moreover, intertextuality, and use of new images and metaphors are the common features of Arabic and English modernist poetry.

Many Arab critics argue that Arabic poetic modernism is similar to English modernism. Others view it as a new poetic movement in form, content, and style, as a distinctive case of innovation in the modern era. Mikhail Nuaymah says that Arabic literary renaissance in the 20th century was a breeze of fragrance which came from the garden of the Western literatures. In the same line, Jabra Ibrahim Jabra says that movement of Arabic new poetry is connected to the movement of modern Art in Europe, so the renewal came to us from the west. Dr. Abd Al-Rahman Al-Qa'ud, in his book *The Obscurity in Poetry of Modernism*, says that it is obvious that Arab modernist poets were

influenced by the west and its culture, especially by certain poets like Anglo-American poet T. S. Eliot, the Irish poet and dramatist William Butler Yeats, the British poet and critic, Edith Sitwell, the American poet and writer Edgar Allan Poe, as well as the French poets Charles Baudelaire, Arthur Rimbaud, and Paul Valéry, and the Spanish poet Federico García Lorca. Ali Haddad, in his book *Badr Shakir Al-Sayyab Another Reading* mentions that Al-Sayyab followed Edith Sitwell's style of employing myths. However, T. S. Eliot remains the most influential figure among the Arab modernist poets particularly Al-Sayyab, al-Bayyati, and Abd al-Sabur. Arab modernist poets found the conventional themes of *Madih* [Panegyric], *Hija* [Lampoon or Satire], *Ritha* [Elegy], *Wasf* [Descriptive poetry], *Ghazal* [Love poetry], *Khamriyyat* [Wine poetry], *Tardiyyat* [Hunt poetry] and *Zuhdiyyat* [Ascetic poetry] as chains that hinder the poet from innovation. The obsession with renewal was an engrossing issue. Therefore, they revolted against the traditional poetics and established new techniques and themes.

4.1.1 Vision in Arabic and English Modernist Poetry

Arab modernist poets and critics define new poetry as a vision. Among them is Adonis who says: "Perhaps the best way to define New Poetry is to say that it is a vision. By its nature, a vision is jump outside the present concepts. It is therefore a change in the order of things and in the way of looking at them."¹ Arab critics also argue that modernism is a vision as well as an aesthetic form. Poetic vision does not reflect the reality of the life the poet lives in, but launches on the ground of reality and tends toward the future through the reality. For Adonis, vision is a device that reveals the unseen. In his book *An Introduction to Arab Poetics*, Adonis says: "Modernity should be a creative

¹M. M. Badawi, *A Critical Introduction to Modern Arabic Poetry* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1975) 232.

vision, or it will be no more than a fashion.”² According to Mohyy Din Subhi, vision in poetry is a deep glance and a comprehensive sight of life. It is an interpretation of the past and future simultaneously. It is a comprehensive sight, but not a comprehensive philosophy.

In English poetry, ‘vision’ is an old poetic term; Jonathan Swift, the Anglo-Irish essayist and poet defines it as “the art of seeing the invisible”. And Samuel T. Coleridge, the English poet and critic says that his eyes make pictures when they are shut. Yet, vision in the modernist poem means neither the ordinary sight of something nor a waking dream of the poet. Poetic vision is a kind of knowledge that oversteps the limited knowledge of the apparent phenomena. The poets feel that they possess the power of vision more than others. The French painter Paul Gauguin says that he shuts his eyes in order to see. According to *Princeton Encyclopedia of Poetry and Poetics*:

Vision has been a favorite word in the vocabulary of poets, but it has become common in criticism only in the modern period. It is a word rich in ambiguities and overtones of meaning, which frequently generate ironies in the contexts in which it is used. . . . Contemporary criticism uses vision in a variety of senses. Occasionally, vision refers simply to a poet’s visual images as these appear in descriptive passages or figures of speech. On the other hand, a critic like Frye uses vision in an extended sense as a synonym for literature itself, or at least for the thematic component of literature. According to Frye, literature is not an imitation of nature and makes no reference to reality; rather it is the dream of man, an imaginative projection of man’s desires and fears. . . . But the sense in which vision is

²Adonis, *An Introduction to Arab Poetics*, Catherine Cobham, trans (Cairo: American UP, 1992) 101.

most frequently used in contemporary criticism is that given to it by expressionist critics, who use the term . . . to refer to an author's world view- his ideas, attitudes, feelings, and evaluations about God, nature, and man. (Preminger 990-91)

According to the *Princeton Encyclopedia of Poetry and Poetics*, visions are appreciated if they are complex, deep, comprehensive, original, or authentic and are blamed if they are simple, shallow, narrow, standardized, or inauthentic.³ A poet's vision can refer to the impersonality or personality of the poet. Vision in the modernist poem is the most creative device through which the poet employs the past in the present and the poem seems not to be a record of the events or a witness.

4.1.2 Periodizing Arabic and English Literary Modernisms

The starting point of any crucial phase is always a moot point. From the perspective of some Arab writers, modernism is a term, which stands for the intellectual mode and the social ideology of life and behavior. It is not a general word which denotes novelty or development; it takes place in every era⁴. Some writers attribute the evolution of Arabic literary modernism to the factor of time, while other writers attribute its emergence to the factor of epistemology. This argument with regard to the era of Arabic literary modernism can be categorized into three views. The first view marks modernism as a continuous movement within the whole Arab literary history and in each era practiced modernism. For instance, in the pre-Islamic period there was a poetic modernism in the poetry of Imru'l-Qays.⁵ In the time of the advent of Islam, there was a

³Alex Preminger, ed, *Princeton Encyclopedia of Poetry and Poetics* (London: Macmillan, 1974) 991.

⁴Naser Addin Alasad (1922 -) a former minister of education in Jordan.

⁵Imru'l-Qays *Ibn Hujr* an Arab poet is acknowledged as the most distinguished poet of pre-Islamic. He is

modernism which revolutionized the way of life and ideology of Arabs. The poets changed their vision towards life and the universe. In the Umayyad period (661 - 750), modernism was discernible in the poetry of Bashshar Ibn Burd. In the Abbasid period (750 - 1258), modernism was noticed in the poetry of Abu Nuwas Abu Tammam Al-Mutanabbi, Abu'l-Ala' al-Ma'arri, Al-Niffari, and Al-Hallaj, Omar Ibn Al-Farid, and in the poetry of Ibn Arabi. In the 20th century, modernism began in the poetry of *Apollo* poets. Muhsin J. Al-Musawi, in his book *Arabic Poetry Trajectories of Modernity and Tradition*, states:

The structure gave way to many innovations between the eighth and eleventh centuries that betrayed dissatisfaction not only with the erotic prelude and its obsolete recollections of desert life, but mainly with ongoing tendencies to imitate the ancients and to apply worn out imagery to a different life and culture. Bashshar Ibn Burd (d. 783), Abn Nuwms (d. 815), Muslim Ibn al-Walld (d. 823), Abn Tammam (d. 845), Al-Mutanabbi (d. 965), and Abu al-Ala al-Marri (d. 1057) were, respectively, among the pioneers in this innovative enterprise, whereas pre-Islamic poets like Imru' al-Qays have become the strong precursors and forebears in terms of eloquence, spontaneity of experience, and daring involvement in life. Their names recur among the modernists as household words, and their poetry and life are drawn upon in assemblies and speeches. With such names in the back of their minds, modernists can hardly forfeit a sense of cultural or even genealogical succession. (Al-Musawi 2)

According to Adonis, poetic modernism in Arabic poetry sprang up in the 8th

century. He adds that Arabic modernism retreated because of the invasion of Baghdad by Tartars in 1258 and because of the Crusades⁶, then because of the Turkish domination of the Arab world which spanned from 1515 until the World War I. The second view argues that Arabic modernism began with the French invasion of Egypt in 1798, and continued during the rule of Mohammed Ali Pasha, who ruled Egypt from 1805 to 1848. This view is supported by Jamal Al-Din Al-Afghani and Mohammed Abduh, who advocated for openness to the West without losing Arabic identity. Other writers divided the period of Arabic literary modernism into three phases: the first phase began in 1932 when the Apollo group was founded. The second phase began in 1947 when the first poem in free verse was composed⁷. The third phase is called Adonis' phase, which is continuing up to the present day. In his book *Arabic Poetry Trajectories of Modernity and Tradition*, Muhsin J. Al-Musawi says

[M]odernity properly began with the emergence of coteries, groups, and schools that came into contact with Russia and Europe, and developed a new consciousness of individualism and democracy, like the Diwan School in Egypt (1912), with a publication under this name in 1921, and the following one Apollo (with a journal under this name, too, 1932–1934). Soon after the Second World War, another radical change under the rubric of the Free Verse Movement took over the poetic scene. (Al-Musawi 9)

The third view argues that modernism in the contemporary period started with the

⁶It was a series of wars by Christian armies who came from Europe in 11th, 12th and 13th centuries to take Palestine from the Muslims.

⁷According to Salma Khadra Jayyusi, Nazik al-Mala'ika asserts that it was she, who wrote the first free verse in modern Arabic poetry with her poem *Al-Kulira* which was published in 1947. Al-Sayyab, on the other hand asserts that his poem in free verse entitled *Hal Kana Hubban*, was written before Al-Mala'ika's.

rise of *Qasidat Al-Tafeelah*⁸ [Foot Poem] that was published in 1947. Jayyusi, in her article “Modernist poetry in Arabic” divides Arabic modernist period into three phases: the first phase from 1948 to 1967, the second phase in the Seventies, and the third in the Eighties.

Dr. Sa'd Di'bis⁹ divides modern Arab poets into three groups. The first group is the neoclassic poets¹⁰ such as the pioneers of Arabic renaissance [Nahda], Mahmud Sami Al-Barudi, Ahmed Shauqi, and Hafiz Ibrahim in Egypt; Al-Rusafi and Mahdi Al-Jawahiri in Iraq; Bisharah Al-Khuri in Lebanon, and others. The second group is the romantic poets or the escapist poets such as Khalil Mutarn, Illyas Abu Shabakah, Umar Abu Rishah. As well as the *Diwan* poets, *Apollo* Group and *Mahjar* poets.¹¹ The third group is the modernist poets who created a new poetic style that differs from the traditional one in form and content. Such new poetry is an attempt to absorb human culture in general. For Arab modernist poets, Arabic classical poetry and its inherited culture did not respond to the challenges of the modern world, and to their aspiration to create a universal poetry. In his book *An Introduction to Arab Poetics*, Adonis states:

Modernity was both of time and outside time: of time because it is rooted in the movement of history, in the creativity of humanity, coexisting with man's striving to go beyond the limitations which surround him; and outside time because it is a vision which includes in it all times and cannot

⁸The meters of rhythmical poetry are known in Arabic as Seas. The measuring unit of the “seas” is known as (Tafeelah) with every sea containing certain number of *Tafeelah* that the poet has to observe in every verse [bait] of the poem.

⁹Egyptian writer and critic.

¹⁰For some Arab critics, these poets should be named as the poets of heritage or the conservative poets instead of neoclassic poets, because the rules of Aristotle are not applicable on their poems in which the element of emotion was as important as the reason.

¹¹The Mahjar poets: were the Arab emigrant poets who emigrated to north and South America such as Jibran Khalil Jibran (1883-1931), Mikhail Nuaymah (1889-1988), Illya Abu Madhi (1889-1957), and Nasib Arida (1887-1946). Most of the *Mahjar* poets were Christian from Syria and Lebanon.

only be recorded as a chronological event. (Adonis 99)

Periodizing Western modernism is one of the problematic issues of modernism. As modernism is an umbrella and polycentric term, it is hard to accurately determine the starting point of modernism. It has been characterized as a social dynamic that cannot be determined by a specific phase or era, because it is a historical process. Richard Sheppard, in his article “The Problematics of European Modernism”¹², articulates that there is a general consensus among the critics that the period between 1885 and 1935 is the period of modernism. Other critics set its starting-date as early as 1870, and set its ending in the 1950. Still other critics have pinpointed a specific place and specific time for modernism: Europe as its place and age of Renaissance as its starting point. However, the span of Modernism from the last decades of the 19th century to the first half of the 20th century remains the most significant period of modernism. Peter Childs says that the term modern was used for the Post-Renaissance age in England. He further says that the term ‘modern’ is the root of the word ‘modernism’, and it has been used to distinguish modern English from Middle English, while the term ‘modernist’ came into existence by the end of the 16th century. In the 18th century, the term modern came to indicate the follower and the supporter of modern literature over old one. Childs indicates that Charles Baudelaire coined the term ‘modernity’ for the first time in the mid-nineteenth century, and Ruben Dario used the term ‘modernism’ in his writings for the first time in 1890s. For Sonja Samberger, the Nicaraguan poet, Ruben Dario seems to be the first critic to speak of modernism (modernismo) in 1888. The Anglo-American poet and critic, John Crowe Ransom, in his essay “The Future of Poetry” published in 1924, was the first

¹²Steve Giles, ed, *Theorizing Modernism* (London: Routledge, 1993).

poet and critic ‘who speaks of “modernism” in the context of Imagism’¹³. Furthermore, W. R. Inge, in his essay “Modernism in Literature”¹⁴ states “the barbarous Latin word *modernus* occurs first in the sixth century, in the grammarian Priscian, and Cassiodorus, an official of Theodoric”. J. A. Cuddon in his *The Penguin Dictionary Of Literary Terms and Literary Theory* states:

It is valid to point out certain places and periods where and when modernist tendencies were at their most active and fruitful. For example, in France from the 1890s until 1940s; in Russia during the pre-revolutionary years and the 1920s; in Germany from the 1890s and on during the 1920s; in England from early in the 20th c. and during 1920s and 1930s; in America from shortly before the First World War and on during the inter-war period. (Cuddon 515)

Critics and writers are not unanimous on the term ‘modernism’ when they attempt to define, classify, and explicate it. For Frank Kermode, there are two phases of modernism: paleo-modernism, and neo-modernism. Paleo-modernism refers to the new movements roughly between 1920 and 1941, and Neo-Modernism refers to the movements after 1920¹⁵. And what Kermode calls neo-modernism is called Post-Modernism by other critics¹⁶. Unlike the division of Kermode, some critics have divided modernism into pre-modernism, high modernism or proper modernism, proto-modernism, popular modernism, late modernism, or post-modernism. Pre-modernism

¹³Sonja Samberger, *Artistic Outlaws: The Modernist Poetics of Edith Sitwell, Amy Lowell, Gertrude Stein and H.D.* (London, 2005) 17.

¹⁴Tim Middleton, ed, *Modernism: Critical Concepts in Literary and Cultural Studies*, vol. 2 (London: Routledge, 2003) 33.

¹⁵J. A. Cuddon, *The Penguin Dictionary of Literary Terms and Literary Theory* (London: Penguin, 1977).

¹⁶Malcolm Bradbury and James McFarlane, ed, *Modernism 1890-1930* (London: Penguin, 1976).

was associated with the Western thinkers like Darwin, Freud, and Marx and high modernism or proper modernism expanded from 1910 to 1930. The Egyptian literary theorist Ihab Hassan has differentiated between modernism and post-modernism. He attempted to explore the concept of post-modernism by contrasting it with modernism. According to Steve Giles, the theoretical commentaries on postmodernism have introduced incompatible differences between postmodernism and modernism. Firstly, he regards postmodernism as a clear rejection of modernism. Secondly, he views postmodernism as the dead end of modernism. Thirdly, he indicates that postmodernism remains within the ambit of modernism.¹⁷

Thus, the period of the Western modernism is misty and blurring. It cannot be determined by a specific date. Richard Sheppard in his essay “The Problematics of European modernism” indicates that the boundaries of the modernism era are among the problems in determining what modernism is.¹⁸ Nevertheless, some critics divide the period of Western literary modernism into two phases: the first phase from the last decade of the 19th century until the 1930s. The second phase began in 1930s and lasted until the end of the 2nd World War; and it is referred to as the second generation of modernism. Others point out that the period between 1910 and 1930 is an explosion era of modernism. Of these are the controversial English writer D. H. Lawrence who says that the old world ended in 1910; and the British novelist and critic Virginia Woolf who claims that modernism began in 1910. Ezra Pound links the birth of modernism with the birth of imagism, which he led in 1912. It is also said that modernism spanned from 1900 until the World War II. In addition, literary modernism is viewed as a cultural movement

¹⁷Steve Giles, ed, *Theorizing Modernism* (London: Routledge, 1993) 176.

¹⁸Ibid.

of the first half of the 20th century and peaked between 1910 and 1925. Particular works have contributed in crystallizing the concept of literary modernism in the beginning of the 20th century. These works are Eliot's "The Waste Land" (1922) and James Joyce's *Ulysses* (1922).

4.1.3 Arabic and English Literary Modernisms vs Tradition

Adonis believes that returning to the past means to reproduce the experiments of the past creators. However, he claims that Arabic cultural heritage is the starting point of Arabic modernism. In this context, Adonis says: "For an Arab poet to be truly modern his writing must glow like a flame which rises from the fire of the ancient, but at the same time is entirely new."¹⁹ In this sense, Adonis agrees with Eliot regarding traditional heritage and its relation with innovation. Some Arab critics argue that modernist poets should detach themselves from the past. Adonis, in his magazine *Mawaqif*, contradicts himself when he writes that the Arab modernist poets should establish new Arabic era by cutting themselves off from the past completely. He adds that to break away from the past is to criticize the cultural heritage especially the dominant and common culture. Adonis states that he did not discover modernity in Arabic poetry through Arabic culture but through reading Baudelaire, who enabled him to understand the poetic modernism of Abu Nuwas. Adonis states:

I must also admit that I did not discover this modernity in Arabic poetry from within the prevailing Arab cultural order and its systems of knowledge. It was reading Baudelaire which changed my understanding of Abu Nuwas and revealed his particular poetical quality and modernity,

¹⁹Adonis, *An Introduction to Arab Poetics*, Catherine Cobham, trans (Cairo: American UP, 1992) 101.

and Mallarme's work which explained to me the mysteries of Abu Tammam's poetic language and the modern dimension in it. My reading of Rimbaud, Nerval and Breton led me to discover the poetry of the mystic writers in all its uniqueness and splendour and the new French criticism gave me an indication of the newness of al-Jurjani's critical vision. I found no paradox in declaring that it was resent Western modernity which led me to discover our own, older modernity outside our 'modern' politico-cultural system established on a Western model. (Adonis 80-81)

On the other hand, Adonis states that Arab modernity should be studied within Arabic perspective on the level of principles and actual historical development, but to study it from Western perspective would be to distort it²⁰. Adonis' reflection on the issue of the relationship between modernism and tradition is often contradictory. He views that any literary theory should originate from an intellectual concept or ideological principles. In contradiction, he explores Arabic modernism through reading Western modernism.

Western modernist writers bear discordant views towards the notion of tradition in literary theory and register diverse attitudes towards it. One group strives to erase tradition and attempts to conceal affinity with the precursors. The representatives of this group are the Italian futurist poet Filippo Marinetti, French poet and critic Charles Baudelaire, and the American writer Gertrude Stein. The American modernist poet William Carlos Williams criticized the return to antiquity and regarded it as reactionary, which threatens modernism. Virginia Woolf stresses the discontinuity of the traditional past with the shaken present, and describes it as a

²⁰Adonis, *An Introduction to Arab Poetics*, Catherine Cobham, trans (Cairo: American UP, 1992) 83.

“frightening discontinuity.”²¹ For Astradur Eysteinsson, “modernism is a legitimate concept broadly signifying a paradigmatic shift, a major revolt, beginning in the mid- and late nineteenth century, against the prevalent literary and aesthetic traditions of the Western world.”²² The English modernist theoretician T. E. Hulme argued that modernism is nothing other than a “wholesale rejection of romanticism and all it stood for, and a return to a new classicism.”²³ For this group, modernism is a rebellion against traditional concepts and practices.

The second group strives to recover tradition and save it from destruction. The representatives of this group are T. S. Eliot, the German critic and philosopher Walter Benjamin, and the Irish novelist James Joyce. Eliot emphasized on the necessity of a positive relation between modern and traditional heritage. In his essay “Tradition and the Individual Talent”, Eliot states “Tradition should positively be discouraged. We have seen many such simple currents soon lost in the sand; and novelty is better than repetition. Tradition is a matter of much wider significance”. Eliot also adds: “[n]o poet, no artist of any art, has his complete meaning alone. His significance, his appreciation is the appreciation of his relation to the dead poets and artists”. “The present is directed by the past” i.e. tradition. Eliot was criticized as the most traditional poet of the age.²⁴ He drew inspiration from the French symbolists and was influenced by the English metaphysical poets. For this group, modernism is not only a creative achievement of the present but also a critical appreciation of the

²¹Irving Howe, “The Characteristics of Modernism”, ed, Tim Middleton, *Modernism Critical Concepts in Literary and Cultural Studies*, vol. 2 (London: Routledge, 2003).

²²Astradur Eysteinsson, *The Concept of Modernism* (New York: Cornell UP, 1990) 2

²³Gabriel Josipovici, “The Birth of the Modern 1885-1914”, Tim Middleton, ed, *Modernism: Critical Concepts in Literary and cultural Studies*, vol. 2 (London: Routledge, 2003) 241.

²⁴Michael Grant, ed, *T. S. Eliot: The Critical Heritage*, vol. 1 (Routledge 1997).

past. The third group bears ambivalent responses towards tradition and modernism such as the Norwegian playwright, Henrik Ibsen and the American novelist and short story writer, Nella Larsen²⁵. According to Anthony Giddens, tradition “is not wholly static, because it has to be reinvested by each new generation as it takes over its cultural inheritance from those preceding it.”²⁶ For this group, modernism was anti-traditional stylistically and criticized the past and its cultural heritage.

4.2. Al-Sayyab and Abd al-Sabur vs Eliot: Points of Convergence and Departure

Due to the cultural and ideological differences between Al-Sayyab and Abd al-Sabur on one hand and Eliot on the other, their visions of life, universe, and God are not the same. However, they relatively hold a similar view on poetic modernism. They utilize the same techniques: ironies, metaphors, symbols, myths, and other devices of expression to create a modernist poem. Politically, Al-Sayyab was communist and Abd al-Sabur had a tendency towards socialism while T. S. Eliot was antipathetic to the modern concepts of democracy, socialism and progress.²⁷ He was an imperialist poet.²⁸

Eliot theorized the poet’s relationship with the past in his article “Tradition and the Individual Talent”. Eliot asserted that the historical sense of the cultural heritage is essential to the poet. In his poem “The Waste Land”, Eliot links his theory with his practice by alluding to ancient literary works and mythologies. Al-Sayyab and Eliot connected the past and present by using ancient myths and allusions to the ancient literary

²⁵ Anne E. Fernald, “Modernism and Tradition”, Astradur Eysteinnsson and Vivian Liska, ed, *Modernism: A Comparative History of Literatures in European Languages* (Amsterdam: John Benjamins, 2007) 157-171.

²⁶ Muhsin J. Al-Musawi, *Arabic Poetry Trajectories of modernity and tradition* (London: Routledge, 2006).

²⁷ Rampal D. K. Rampal ed, *Critical Study of T. S. Eliot: Eliot At 100 Years* (New Delhi: Atlantic, 2003).

²⁸ Michael Grant, ed, *The Critical Heritage T. S. Eliot*, vol.1 (Routledge, 1982).

texts. For instance, in his poems: “Shanasheel Ibnat Al-Jalabi” [The Balcony of the Nobleman’s Daughter], “Unshudat Al-Matar” [The Rain Song], “Al-Mabad Al-Ghareeq” [The Sunken Temple], “Madinat al-Sindabad” [The City of Sindabad], “Al-Awdah li Jaikur” [Return to Jaikur], “Fi al-Maghrib al-Arabi” [In the Arab Maghrib], “Al-Mumis Al-Amya” [The Blind Harlot], Al-Sayyab alluded to some historical stories mentioned in the Noble Quran such as the story of *Qabil*, *Thamud*, *Yajuj* and *Majuj*, *Abraha*, *Kaba*, *Hira*, Mohammed, and Maryam [Mary]. Al-Sayyab also alluded to the historical Arab figures such as *Al-Basus*²⁹, Al-Shimr³⁰ in his poem “Marthiyat Jaikur” [Elegy on Jaikur]. Moreover, in his, poems “Al-Sha’ir al-Rajeem” [The Evil Poet], “Unshudat Al-Matar” [The Rain Song], “Al-Mabad al-Ghareeq” [The Sunken Temple], “Tammuz Jaikur” [Tammuz of Jaikur], “Min Ru'ya Fukai” [From Fukai's Vision], “Cerberus in Babel”, “Li Anni Ghareeb” [For I am A Stranger], “Umm Al-Brom”, Al-Sayyab alluded to many ancient myths such as Tammuz, Persephone, Zeus, Apollo, Tantalus, Midas, Cerberus, Ganymede, Attis, Ishtar, and Narcissus. Similarly, Eliot quoted from the ancient literary works of , Homer, Virgil, Dante, Chaucer, Spenser, Shakespeare, John Milton, Andrew Marvell, and Baudelaire. Moreover, the Bible, the Buddha’s Fire Sermon, James Frazer’s *The Golden Bough* and Jessie Weston’s *From Ritual to Romance* were the main sources of Eliot’s myths and symbols in his poetry.

On the contrary, Abd al-Sabur was not interested in mythologies, but he could reconcile with tradition and contemporariness, Western culture and Arabic culture. He also linked the past with the present through employing the historical figures such as the mystic poet al-Hallaj and through employing the historical symbols such as *Ammuriyah*,

²⁹*Al-Basus* was a famous war between the *Taghlib* tribe and *Bakr* tribe, two rival clans in Arabia in the Pre-Islamic period. These two tribes fought roughly forty years.

³⁰Al-Hussein was killed and beheaded in the battle of Karbalā in 680 (61 AH) by Shimr Ibn Thil-Jawshan.

Al-Mutasim, *Al-Tatars*, the Cross, and Abu Tammam. In his poem “Tatars Raided”, Abd al-Sabur says:

هجم التتار
ورموا مدينتنا العريقة بالدمار

Tatars raided,
And fired destruction in our ancient city.³¹

In his poem “Abu Tammam”, Abd al-Sabur says:

الصوت الصارخ في عموريه
لم يذهب في البريه
سيف "البغدادى" الثائر
شق الصحراء اليه ... لباه
حين دعت اخت عربية
وامعتصماه
لكن الصوت الصارخ في طبريه
لباه مؤتمران
لكن الصوت الصارخ في وهران
لبته الاحزان

That shocking voice in Amorium³²

Did not vanish in the desert

The Baghdadi avenger with his sword

Crossed the desert to succor

³¹My translation.

³²Amorium was a city under the Byzantine Empire. In Arabic, it is called Ammuriyah. It is located now in Turkey. It was invaded by Arabs in 838 when Al-Mutasim the Caliph in Baghdad got news that a Muslim woman was captured by the Byzantine army and cried Oh Mutasim (Wa Mo'tasimah).

That Arab woman who cried:

Oh my Mu'tasim.³³

But for the shocking voice

(of a woman) in Tabariya³⁴

No succor, but two conferences.

But for the shocking voice (of a woman) in Wahran,

No Mu'tasim, but sorrows.³⁵

Looking to Eliot's poem "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock", the poem is visionary not documentary. Eliot presented his vision on modernity through a tale of his persona Prufrock, who could not integrate himself into a modern society.

Let us go then, you and

When the evening is spread out against the sky

Like a patient etherised upon a table;

Let us go, through certain half-deserted streets,

The muttering retreats

Of restless nights in one-night cheap hotels

And sawdust restaurants with oyster-shells:

Streets that follow like a tedious argument

Of insidious intent

To lead you to an overwhelming question ... (1-10)

The poem reflects the poet's impression towards universe, man, and life in general. Eliot does not rely on supernatural power or the naked eye to introduce his

³³Al-Mu'tasim Ibn Harun (794 –842) was an Abbasid caliph (833 - 842).

³⁴A city in Palestine.

³⁵My translation.

vision in this poem. His vision is shaped by the allusions that interpret the past and the present. Similarly, Al-Sayyab and Abd al-Sabur's visions are inspired by reading myths and the historical figures. Looking at Eliot's "The Waste Land", the poem is not a portrait of nature and its cruelty. The creative vision of the poet lies in his ability to draw hints from the past to interpret the present and the future.

April is the cruellest month, breeding
 Lilacs out of the dead land, mixing
 Memory and desire, stirring
 Dull roots with spring rain.
 Winter kept us warm, covering
 Earth in forgetful snow, feeding
 A little life with dried tubers. (1-7)

Through his poem "The Waste Land", Eliot displays his moral vision to the world and criticizes modernity for degrading humanistic values. While Al-Sayyab's poems display his revolutionary vision as well as his personal and national sorrow. Like Eliot's "April is the cruellest month", Al-Sayyab in his poem "Madinat Al-Sindabad" [The City of Sindbad] ironically says:

Oh Spring
 Oh Spring, what has afflicted you?
 You have come without rain
 You have come without flowers,
 You have come without fruit,
 And your end was like your beginning

Wrapped round in gore; now summer
 Is upon us with black clouds
 Its days full of cares
 And its nights
 We spend wakefully, counting the stars. (Khouri 99)

4.2.1. Impersonality: The Poets' Self-Concealment

Impersonality also called by some critics as objectivity, is one of the focal themes treated by critics. New Criticism asserts that impersonality associates with the modernist poetry as subjectivity associates with the romantic poetry. Impersonality is referred to as the unseen ingredient in the structure of the modernist poem. According to the critics of modernist poetry, a modernist poet should efface himself from his work. Yet the concepts of impersonality and subjectivity seem crucial to modernist poetry. This study will examine impersonality in the poetry of Al-Sayyab, Abd al-Sabur, and T. S. Eliot.

Unlike Al-Sayyab and Abd al-Sabur, T. S. Eliot was aware of the matter of personality and impersonality in poetry. However, he could not escape being impersonal in his poetry. In his book *The poetics of Impersonality*, Maud Ellmann³⁶ argues that T. S. Eliot and Ezra Pound advocate impersonality, but they often smuggle their personality back into their poetics. He adds that Eliot insists that poetry originates in personal emotion, and the poet's subjectivity pervades the text.³⁷ Eliot inveighed the personality of romantic poets for being engrossed in subjectivity in their poems. In his essay "Traditions and the Individual Talent", Eliot says: "Poetry is not a turning loose of emotion, but an escape from emotion; it is not the expression of personality, but an escape from

³⁶A Lecturer in English, University of Southampton.

³⁷Maud Ellmann, *The poetics of Impersonality: T. S. Eliot and Ezra Pound* (Harvard UP, 1987).

personality. But, of course, only those who have personality and emotions know what it means to want to escape from these things.” (Eliot, *Selected Essays* 21)

For Eliot, ‘impersonality is a process of depersonalization’. He has coined the term ‘Objective Correlative’ to ‘express a personal point of view whose source issues below the intellect.’³⁸ In his essay “Hamlet”, Eliot says: “The only way of expressing emotion in the form of art is by finding an ‘objective correlative’; in other words, a set of objects, a situation, a chain of events which shall be the formula of that particular emotion; such that when the external facts, which must terminate in sensory experience, are given, the emotion is immediately evoked.” Eliot has differentiated between two forms of impersonality. In his essay “Yeats” he states:

There are two forms of Impersonality that which is natural to mere skilful craftsman, and that which is more and more achieved by the maturing artist. The first is that of what I have called the ‘anthology piece’, of lyric by Lovelace...The second impersonality is that of the poet who, out of intense and personal experience, is able to express a general truth: retaining all the particularity of his experience, to make of it a general symbol. (Eliot, *On Poetry and Poets* 255)

Impersonality means the natural objectivity whereas subjectivity implies the poet’s personal feelings about his subject. Modernist poetry utilizes the element of impersonality or objectivity as a main feature in its structure. According to *The Penguin Dictionary of Literary Terms and Literary Theory*, subjectivity in writing ‘suggests that the writer is primarily concerned with conveying personal experience and feeling’. Subjectivity reflects the self of the poet, and reveals how far the pronoun ‘I’ can be

³⁸Albert Gelpi, *A Coherent Splendor: The American Poetic Renaissance 1910-1950* (Cambridge UP, 1987).

perceived in the text throughout all the poetic devices. In other words, poetry is considered impersonal, when the poet does not use the first-person singular pronouns 'I', 'me', and 'my'. The charisma of the poet can be analyzed by pondering over the formal poetic elements and thematic poetic elements. The modernist poets neither have to manifest themselves in their writings nor to dissemble their emotions. When a poet is scripted in his text, it means that his subjectivity pervades the text, so such texts cannot be described as objective or impersonal texts. Exposing Eliot's poems to the criteria of impersonality and subjectivity leads to compromise the problematic controversial about this issue. This study will examine Eliot's impersonality by tracing the use and the absence of the first-person singular pronouns 'I', 'me', and 'my' in his early poems.

T. S. Eliot utilizes the first-person pronouns 'I', 'me', and 'my' in his early poems very often. For instance, in his "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock", the pronouns 'I', 'me', and 'my' are repeated frequently. The repetition of the first-person singular pronouns in the poem as they are shown in the above-mentioned verses, elucidate that Eliot's subjectivity pervades the poem, though he advocates poetic impersonality. In the entire poem "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock", Eliot employs the first-person pronouns together 57 times. The significance of such use in the poem indicates the supremacy of individuality or the subjectivity. Even though the speaker in the poem is Mr. J. Alfred Prufrock, the poem itself remains Eliot's expression. The relationship between Eliot and his first-person pronouns does not reflect Eliot's narcissism, but it echoes his personality as a poet. Prufrock is not Eliot, whereas in actuality it is Eliot, who created the monologue, not Prufrock. Poet's self-effacement is an important characteristic of a modernist poem. According to *The Cambridge History of Literary Criticism* "The

poem does not express the personality of the poet; but without the spur of personal feelings, the poem would not have been written at all.”³⁹ Eliot’s “Portrait of A Lady” is one of his early poems which utilizes the dramatic monologue and the first-person singular pronouns. Harold Kaplan in his book *Poetry, Politics and Culture* maintains that there is more personal disengagement in Eliot’s “Portrait of A Lady”. Eliot in his essay “The Tree Voices” says:

I think that in every poem, from the private meditation to the epic or the drama, there is more than one voice to be heard. If the author never spoke to himself, the result would not be poetry, though it might be magnificent rhetoric; and part of our enjoyment of great poetry is the enjoyment of overhearing words which are not addressed to us. But if the poem were exclusively for the author, it would be a poem in a private and unknown language; and a poem which was a poem only for the author would not be a poem at all. (Eliot on Poetry and Poets 100)

In his book *Thomas Stearns Eliot, Poet*, Anthony David says that “Portrait of a Lady” is ‘charged with romantic sentiment, yet the poem itself is not at all romantic’. Utilizing the first-person singular pronoun in the poem is not a sufficient proof to assert the poet’s personality because it may indicate a persona rather than the poet. Moreover, Eliot asserts that poetry is an escape from personality, and the rejection of subjectivity and self-assertion in his writing. However, critics have different views on Eliot’s concept of impersonality. In their book *T. S. Eliot and The Concept of Tradition*, Cianci, Giovanni and Jason Harding state:

³⁹A. Walton Litz, Louis Menand, and Lawrence S. Rainey, eds, *The Cambridge History of Literary Criticism*, vol, 7 (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2000) 30.

The perception that Eliot's concept of impersonality seemed contradictory began early, with reviews of *The Sacred Wood* (1920). Conrad Aiken, for example, outlined the ostensible contradiction between statements about 'impersonality' in the 'Tradition' essay and those in 'Philip Massinger'. The charge of inconsistency was not mitigated by Eliot's comments on *The Waste Land*, which he variously described as impersonal and as 'the relief of a personal and wholly insignificant grouse against life. (Cianci 42)

Other writers argue that Eliot contradicts himself throughout his critical prose of impersonality. Among these writers is Maud Ellmann who wrote a book entitled *The Poetics of Impersonality T. S. Eliot and Ezra Pound*. In his essay "Four Elizabethan Dramatists", Eliot says: "No artist produces great art by a deliberate attempt to express his personality. He expresses his personality indirectly through concentrating upon a task which is a task in the same sense." In his essay "Tradition and The Individual Talent", Eliot says "poetry is not a turning loose of emotion, but an escape from emotion; it is not the expression of personality but an escape from personality. But of course, only those who have personality and emotions know what it means to want to escape from these things." Rajnath in his book *T. S. Eliot's Theory of Poetry: A Study of the Changing Critical Ideas in the Development of His Prose and Poetry*, says:

The problems of impersonality that Eliot confronted in his later poetry differ from those he faced in his early poetry. In the early poetry the experience is personal and the problem is how to depersonalize it, while in the later poetry the experience is general and therefore the problem is how

to individualize it. That is to say, the problem that Eliot has to resolve in the later poetry is just the opposite of his problem in the early poetry. Eliot resolves his problem in “Ash Wednesday” by speaking in his own person and placing the images and symbols, which are highly personal side by side with those, which are liturgical. (Rajnath 110)

On the other hand, some argue that Eliot does not contradict himself or shifts from the doctrine of impersonality to the doctrine of personality, but he is consistent in his theory in which he means that the poet should not express his personality directly and the poem is not an expression of personality. Eliot’s *The Wasteland*, the archetypal text of English modernism, encompasses the first-person singular pronouns (I, me, my) enormously, except the fourth section of the poem “Death by Water” which does not involve any first-person pronouns. In *Ash-Wednesday*, the first-person singular pronouns are present from the opening lines. The English critic Craig Raine, in his book *T. S. Eliot*, says “We first encounter Eliot’s own voice in Ash-Wednesday... In the other earlier poetry, there is a voice which is neither dramatic and characterized nor imbued with Eliot’s own tones; it is a neutral, toneless voice, which he deploys to great effect. It is without personality. It is impersonality.”⁴⁰

In Eliot’s early poetry, his doctrine of the “extinction of personality”, is fulfilled in his later work, that is, in his poem “Ash Wednesday”. In other words, Eliot announced the end of the personal voice and the search for personal identity. The speaker of Eliot’s “Ash Wednesday” refers to the poet himself indirectly as the poem reflects his religious vision of life and God, but Eliot utilizes the persona as a mask to avoid self-expression. “A Song for Simeon” is one of Eliot’s *Ariel Poems*, which was composed between 1927

⁴⁰Craig Raine, *T. S. Eliot* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2006) 91.

and 1930. There is a minimal use of first-person singular pronouns in this poem than his the previous poems. Eliot's "Marina" is among the four poems of his *Ariel Poems* which explores aspects of religious revelation. It is a religious poem written after Eliot's conversion to Christianity. In this poem, use of the first-person singular pronouns is minimal as it is shown in the lines below. In *La Figlia che Piange* which is published in his collection *Prufrock and other Observations*, the speaker here is not Eliot but his persona as the case of his early poems. The speaker here is a third and unseen figure. It is a love poem but not in the romantic style. In this poem, Eliot utilizes the first-person singular pronouns six times. "Mr. Apollinx", also among Eliot's early poems, was published in his collection *Prufrock and Other Observations* and employs the first-person singular pronouns five times. In "Conversation Galante" Eliot uses them five times, while in his poem "Hysteria" and "Rhapsody on a Windy Night", Eliot uses the first-person singular pronouns four times. The inner monologue of an identified name in this poem reveals Eliot's mask. "Journey of the Magi" contains a short dramatic monologue; it is Eliot's most important poem in his collection *Ariel Poems*. It utilized the first-person singular pronoun 'I', four times. "Sweeney Erect" is one of Eliot's poems of 1922. The first-person singular pronoun 'me' is used three times. In Eliot's "The Hollow Men", the first-person singular pronouns are used three times. In Eliot's "Morning at the Window", the first-person pronouns are used two times. Also in "The Boston Evening Transcript" the first-person singular pronouns are used two times. In the last stanza of Eliot's "Preludes", he utilizes the first-person singular pronoun 'I' one time not to express his direct personal ethos, but to express the scene throughout his personae.

Eliot's impersonality and personality cannot be confirmed or denied by the

utilization of the first-person singular pronouns. Because Eliot himself does not deny personality of the poet and maintains in his essay "Tradition and the Individual Talent": "Poetry is not a turning loose of emotion, but an escape from emotion; it is not the expression of personality, but an escape from personality. But, of course, only those who have personality and emotions know what it means to want to escape from these things". The first- person singular pronoun also was utilized one time in other poems such as "The Hippopotamus". Eliot's poem "The Hippopotamus" is among his most impersonal poems, not because of the absence of the first-person singular pronoun in the context which refers to the poet or the speaker in the text, but because of concealment of his individuality even when he uses the first-person singular pronoun, his poem remains characterless and abstract. Moreover, his poem "Whispers of Immortality" contains only one first-person pronoun. "Aunt Helen" is among Eliot's short poems. He utilized first-person singular pronoun once. In some of his poems, Eliot does not use the first-person singular pronoun such as "Cousin Nancy", "Mr. Eliot's Sunday Morning Service", "Sweeney Among the Nightingales", "Burbank With a Baedeker: Bleistein With a Cigar", and "Animula".

In Eliot's early poetry collections *Prufrock and other Observations* and *Ariel Poems*, the first-person singular pronouns are found in many poems. They are repeated more than three times in 14 of the selected poems, three times in two poems, two times in two poems, and one time in four poems and the rest of the five poems do not have any first-person singular pronouns. Eliot was one of the exponents of poetic impersonality. However, he retains a place for personality in his poetry. According to him, 'the theory of impersonality does not deny subjectivism, but sets out to put the author in his place and

to liberate the poem from his narcissism'. Ascertaining the impersonality in Eliot's poetry is only by scrutinizing the use of the first-person singular pronouns in each poem. because use of "persona" is one of the techniques of the modernist poem. Therefore, the first-person singular pronouns in Eliot's poems indicate the persona's subjectivity and not his authorial presence. Eliot in his essay "The Three Voices of Poetry" says:

The first voice is the voice of the poet taking to himself-or to nobody. The second is the voice of the poet addressing an audience, whether large or small. The third is the voice of the poet when he attempts to create a dramatic character speaking in verse; when he is saying, not what he would say in his own person, but only what he can say within the limits of one imaginary character addressing another imaginary character. (Eliot, *On Poetry and Poets* 89)

Such poetic communication creates a problematic for the reader. The conflation between Eliot and his personae causes confusion because Eliot asserts impersonality in poetry. Robert C. Elliott in his book *The Literary Persona* refers to the relationship between poet's self-projection and the element of persona

The word persona is used by literary interpreters in an effort to clarify the relationship between the writer-the historical person- and the characters the writer creates. That relationship is never simple... but it is made more difficult when the writer uses the first person singular pronoun, when he writes "I"⁴¹

On the other hand, when Eliot credits impersonality as an essential element of

⁴¹Robert C. Elliott, *The Literary Persona* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982) x.

poetry, he also asserts personality of the poet when he maintains that ‘the world of a great poetic dramatist is a world in which the creator is everywhere’. Combination of the dualities of impersonality and personality, wholeness and fragmentation, wit and seriousness, myth and fact, past and present, tradition and new, allusions and creativity, and voice of the persona and the voice of the poet in Eliot’s early poetry made his poetry new, modernist and different from the traditional poetry.

4.2.2. Al-Sayyab vs Eliot: Common Subjects and Use of Allusion and Myth

Many writers in Arabic and English studies compared the Arab poet, Badr Shaker Al-Sayyab with the Anglo-American poet T. S. Eliot. M. M. Badawi in his book *A Critical Introduction to Modern Arabic Poetry* says that the name of T. S. Eliot entered Arabic literary criticism in 1933, and much of Eliot’s poetry was translated into Arabic and published in Arabic literary periodicals. It is noteworthy that, most of the studies which dealt with T. S. Eliot in Arabic literature, focused on the subject of influence from one side, i.e. Eliot’s impact on the modernist Arab poets including Al-Sayyab and Abd Al-Sabur. At the postmodern literary theories, comparative literature liberated itself from the subjects of origin and influence. Accordingly, this study aims to introduce Al-Sayyab as an innovator rather than a copyist and imitator. It is Eliot’s “The Waste Land”, which gave him a privilege among modernist Arab poets. This poem has been celebrated by the Arab poets for its condemnation of the Western civilization that caused crises to humanity such as the world wars and colonialism. Arab poets found Eliot’s poem “The Waste Land” as a kind of critique of the Western imperialism. On the contrary, Eliot has always been criticized for his imperialist view “England and nowhere”⁴². In his poem

⁴²Anthony David Moody, ed, *The Cambridge Companion to T.S. Eliot* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1994).

“Little Gidding” Eliot says:

Here, the intersection of the timeless moment

Is England and nowhere. Never and always.

.....

History is now and England. (54-55, 239)

Eliot himself does not know that his poetry and criticism attracted the Arab poets and intellectuals. Many studies presented Eliot as the most influential poet of the modern Arabic poetry. As Eliot’s clout among the Arab poets associated the clout of the Western colonization in the Arab world, some Arab writers criticized Eliot’s poetry for being a product of a number of the Western colonizers; and the presence of Eliot in the Arabic poetry is a kind of cultural imperialism. Hussein Kadhim, in his essay “Rewriting The Waste Land: Badr Shakir Al-Sayyab’s “Fi al-Maghrib al-Arabi”⁴³, mentions that Eliot explicitly supported the British Empire despite his call for the separation of literature and politics. Kadhim in the same essay also says:

Another sense in which “The Waste Land” can be perceived as Imperialist relates to the way the poem tends to center the Western metropolis. If we allow that The Waste land, as seems plausible, is at least in part about “the immense panorama of futility and anarchy which is contemporary history”, then the poem’s proclamation of centrality of the West becomes all too obvious. Eliot thus assumes that “contemporary history” is synonymous with European, he precludes the possibility of the existence of other histories which may not have been panoramas of futility and anarchy, i. e., the histories of emerging nations. (Kadhim 135)

⁴³Suzanne Pinckney Stetkevych, ed, *Journal of Arabic Literature*, vol. XXX (Leiden: Brill 1999).

Unlike Eliot, Al-Sayyab stood up against the imperialism and resisted the Western hegemony. In his address in 1956, Al-Sayyab states that the role of literature is to support the process of decolonization. Al-Sayyab argues that the task of the great literature is to portray the conflict between evil represented by colonialism and man who struggles for freedom. Al-Sayyab's familiarity with Arabic and English literatures enabled him to broaden his horizons to create hybrid poetics. In traditional Arabic literary criticism, to borrow from the other texts means to commit a poetic fallacy; and such poetic writings have been termed as 'poetic plagiarism'. During the whole phase of historical Arabic poetry, many names have been given to the term of 'borrowing' from other texts such as 'poetic plagiarism', or 'poetic theft', 'influence', 'acculturation', 'hybridity' and finally 'intertextuality'. In other words, the postmodern theories name the process of borrowing from the texts as a process of acculturation and cultural hybridity, rather than 'plagiarism' or 'influence'. 'Postmodern theories' interpret this issue more appropriately than traditional Arabic theories which names the processes of borrowing and the use of allusions as 'poetic plagiarism'. Moreover, there is a difference between the term 'plagiarism' and other terms such as 'influence', 'acculturation', 'hybridity', and 'intertextuality'. Plagiarism occurs intentionally and is considered a theft, while 'influence', 'acculturation' 'hybridity', and 'intertextuality' occur naturally. The cultural hybridity between the Arabs and the West in the 20th century was the outcome of colonialism, immigration and the spread of translation studies. Both Al-Sayyab and Abd al-Sabur lived during the colonial period, and read the world literatures through translation. Therefore, many writers presented Al-Sayyab and Abd al-Sabur negatively through exposing the presence of Eliot in their poetry, which in turn diminished their

creativity and innovation.

Al-Sayyab and Eliot are culturally different, but with their antithetical ideologies, they share common themes and techniques in their poetry. Both poets handle the themes of barrenness, rebirth, alienation, city and death. Al-Sayyab's poetic technique is similar to Eliot's technique with tools like allusions, language, repetition of words and lines, and myth. Like Eliot, Al-Sayyab wrote an innovative poetry marked by deep visions about human and life. Moreover, both poets employ myths symbolically to reveal their world after the world wars. Al-Sayyab and Eliot are also optimistic poets as they highlight the subject of rebirth in their poems. Al-Sayyab justifies the excessive use of myths in his poetry and states that the myths and symbols are among the significant features of modern poetry; myths are necessary to compose new poetry. Al-Sayyab discloses that materialism dominated the societies and replaced the spiritual values. Eliot also presents a similar view about myth when he says in his essay "Ulysses, Order, and Myth"⁴⁴

In using the myth, in manipulating a continuous parallel between contemporaneity and antiquity, Mr. Joyce is pursuing a method which others must pursue after him. They will not be imitators, any more than the scientist who uses the discoveries of an Einstein in pursuing his own, independent, further investigations. It is simply a way of controlling, of ordering, of giving shape and significance to the immense panorama of futility and anarchy which is contemporary history. ... It is, I seriously believe, a step toward making the modern world possible for art.

(Kermode 175-178)

Similarly, mythological allusiveness is at the core of Eliot's poetry. In his poem "The

⁴⁴Frank Kermode, ed, *Selected Prose of T. S. Eliot* (London: Faber and Faber, 1975) 175-178.

Waste Land”, Eliot implicitly refers to the fertility deities when he says:

April is the cruelest month, breeding
Lilacs out of the dead land, mixing
Memory and desire, stirring
Dull roots with spring rain. (1-4)

Both Eliot and Al-Sayyab employ the motif of water as a symbol of rebirth and rejuvenation. In his notes on “The Waste Land”, Eliot states: “I have used especially the two volumes *Adonis*, *Attis*, *Osiris*. Anyone who is acquainted with these works will immediately recognize in the poem certain references to vegetation ceremonies”.

In the section of “The Burial of the Dead”, Eliot refers explicitly to the motif of rebirth: “That corpse you planted last year in your garden / Has it begun to sprout? Will it bloom this year? / Or has the sudden frost disturbed its bed?” (71- 73) In his poem “The Portrait of a Lady”, Eliot refers to the mythical hero of the Trojan War: “You are invulnerable, you have no Achilles' heel.” (61) In his poem “Burbank with a Baedeker: Bleistein with a Cigar”, Eliot refers to the divine Hercules who is characterized by extraordinary strength, courage and ingenuity: “Slowly: the god Hercules / Had left him, that had loved him well” (7-8). Then Eliot implicitly refers to the classical myth of the sun that is ‘figured as a chariot and drawn across the sky by a team of horses’⁴⁵ “The Horses, under the axletree / Beet up the dawn from Istria / With even feet. Her shuttered barge” (9-11). In his poem *Sweeney Erect*, Eliot refers to a group of Greek islands in the southern Aegean Sea called ‘Cyclades’. According to a Greek myth, these Islands are not inhabited because they are buoyant: “Paint me a cavernous waste shore / Cast in the

⁴⁵Nidhi Tiwari, *Imagery and Symbolism in T. S. Eliot's Poetry* (Delhi: Nice Printing Press, 2001).

unstilled Cyclades". (1-2) In the "Sweeney Erect", Eliot refers to another Greek myth: 'Aeolus', the god of wind, 'Ariadne', the daughter of King Minos of Crete, 'Nausicaa', the Phaeacian princess and the daughter of King Alcinous of the Phaeacians, and 'Polypheme', the one-eyed giant, the son of Poseidon and nymph Thoosa. 'Polypheme' is renowned among the Cyclopes and he was captured by the adventurer Odysseus. Eliot says:

Display me Aeolus above
 Reviewing the insurgent gales
 Which tangle Ariadne's hair
 And swell with haste the perjured sails.
 Morning stirs the feet and hands
 (Nausicaa and Polypheme). (5-10)

In the following lines, Eliot refers to the myth of Athenian princess, Philomela who was raped by her brother-in-law, Tereus, the king of Thrace. Tereus cut her tongue. Procne, the king's wife avenged her sister Philomela by killing the king's son, cooking him and serving it to the king. Knowing that he ate his son, the king chased the two sisters to kill them, but Philomela was transformed into a nightingale, and Procne turned into a swallow:

The change of Philomel, by the barbarous king
 So rudely forced; yet there the nightingale
 Filled all the desert with inviolable voice
 And still she cried, and still the world pursues,
 'Jug Jug' to dirty ears. (99-103)

In his poem “Ash-Wednesday”, Eliot refers to Priapus, the god of procreation and gardens: “The silent sister veiled in white and blue / Between the yews, behind the garden god.” (140-141)

Both Eliot and Al-Sayyab choose ironic titles for their poems. For instance, Al-Sayyab’s poem “Unshudat Al-Matar” [Rain Song] is not really a song or hymn that celebrates rainfall and exposes the poet’s happiness when he beholds the rain drops. The polarity between the title of Al-Sayyab’s poem, “Rain Song” and its content reveals the duality of his nature, the joy and hope, the fear and despair. The poem shows the contradictory life of the Arabs who suffer a lot from misery and unhappiness in spite of the huge wealth in their countries. The word ‘rain’ is a symbol of life, fertility and resurrection; the word ‘song’ or ‘hymn’ denotes joy and cheerfulness. The poem’s title indicates the warbling of the birds on the trees and songs of the children. The birds, children and people rejoice and sing when it rains because rain means rejuvenation, green lands, harvest and settlement. Whereas Al-Sayyab’s views towards rain are different. The rain reminds him of tears, death, hunger, poverty, emigration and the miserable Iraqi people. Like Eliot, Al-Sayyab does not celebrate the season of rain and considers it as the cruelest season. The feelings of grief and melancholy in the poem change the title of the poem from “Rain Song” to “Rain Cry”⁴⁶. (Shusha, 91-95)

Similarly, Eliot chooses the title ‘The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock’ to the first poem in his collection *Prufrock and Other Observations*. Like Al-Sayyab’s “Rain Song”,

⁴⁶“Rain Cry”, is an article written in Arabic by Faruq Shusha in *Al-Arabi Book* issue 52, Kuwait Al-Arabi Magazine, 2003.

Faruq Shusha: is an Egyptian writer was born in 1936. He worked as a chief of Egyptian broadcasting from 1994-1997; he also was a professor in The American University in Cairo. He is a member of Arabic Language Council; he writes in Alarabi Magazine as well as Al-Ahram weekly.

Eliot's "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock" is also not a love song. Other titles can be noticed as a common motif between Eliot and Al-Sayyab. For instance, Al-Sayyab chooses titles for his poems which either relate to Eliot's titles or verses of his poems. Among Al-Sayyab's poems' titles are "Al-Nahr wa Al-Maut" [The River and Death] which is relatively similar to Eliot's title "Death by Water". Al-Sayyab's title "Madinat al-Sarab" [The City of Mirage] is similar to Eliot's verse "Unreal city". Al-Sayyab's poem "Madinah Bila Matar" [A City without Rain] is similar to Eliot's verses: "Here is no water but only rock / Rock and no water and the sandy road." (331-332).

Like Al-Sayyab, Eliot employs the Christian figures in his poems. In his poem "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock", Eliot says: 'I am Lazarus, come from the dead' Eliot's verse is similar to Al-Sayyab's 'Lazarus arose from the coffin' of his poem "Ru'ya fi Am 1956" [Vision in 1956].

The following lines refer to the intertextuality between Al-Sayyab and Eliot, especially Eliot's "The Waste Land". In his poem "The Waste Land", Eliot says: 'From which a golden Cupidon peeped out' (80). Similarly, Al-Sayyab's line of his "Al-Mumis Al-Amya" [The Blind Harlot] refers to the golden arrows of Cupid: 'As long as the golden arrows whistle in the air.' In the section of "A Game of Chess", Eliot's line 'The wind under the door' is relatively similar to Al-Sayyab's line:

الباب ما قرعته غير الريح

The door was not knocked on, but the wind.⁴⁷

Moreover, Eliot's line 'I have measured out my life with coffee spoons' of "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock" is like Al-Sayyab's line of his poem, "Malal" [weariness], in which Al-Sayyab says:

⁴⁷My translation.

وأكيل بالأقداح ساعاتي

And I measure my hours with cups.⁴⁸

In his poem “The Waste Land”, Eliot employs the motif of rebirth without mentioning the names of the deities as Al-Sayyab does. Eliot says:

That corpse you planted last year in your garden,
Has it begun to sprout? Will it bloom this year?
Or has the sudden frost disturbed its bed?
O keep the Dog far hence, that's friend to men,
Or with his nails he'll dig it up again! (71-75)

Similarly, Al-Sayyab in his poem “Cerberus in Babel” refers to the motif of rejuvenation. Al-Sayyab employs the ancient myths directly through mentioning the dog of hell, Cerberus and the god of growth and fertility, Tammuz, yet Eliot implicitly refers to the motif of rebirth. Eliot utilizes the image of the normal dog that may exhume human being. On the contrary, Al-Sayyab utilizes mythical dog that digs up the mythical dead Tammuz:

ليعو سربروس في الدروب
و ينبش التراب عن إلهنا الدفين
تموزنا الطعين

Let Cerberus growl in the routes
And exhume our buried god
That is our stabbed Tammuz⁴⁹.

The element of intertextuality between Al-Sayyab's poems and Eliot's “The

⁴⁸Ibid.

⁴⁹Ibid..

Waste Land” is discernable. In the following lines Eliot and Al-Sayyab allude to the Phoenician sailor who drowns in the sea. Both Eliot and Al-Sayyab mention in their notes that they allude to Shakespeare’s play “The Tempest”. In his “The Waste Land”, Eliot says:

Is tour card, the drowned Phoenician Sailor,
(Those are pearls that were his eyes. Look!)

.....

Phlebas the Phoenician, a fortnight dead.

Forget the cry of gulls, and the deep sea swell

And the profit and loss.

A current under sea

Picked his bones in whispers. (47-48, 312-316)

Discernibly, these lines are like Al-Sayyab’s lines of his poem “Min Ru'ya Fukai” [From Fukai’s Vision] in which Al-Sayyab says:

أبوك رائد المحيط ، نام في القرار :

من مقلتيه لؤلؤ يبيعه التجار

Your father, the explorer of the ocean, slept in the depths⁵⁰:

Pearls from his eyeballs that merchants sell⁵¹

Similarly, in his poem “Unshudat al-Matar” [Rain Song], Al-Sayyab also alludes to the myth of the drown Phoenician sailor when he says:

وينثر الخليج من هباته الكثر ،

⁵⁰In his notes on these lines, Al-Sayyab mentions that he alludes to *Ariel Song* of Shakespeare’s *The Tempest*: “Full fathom five thy father lies; / Of his bones are coral made; / Those are pearls that were his eyes: / Nothing of him that doth fade / But doth suffer a sea-change / Into something rich and strange. / Sea-nymphs hourly ring his knell: / Ding-dong. / Hark! now I hear them—Ding-dong, bell.

⁵¹My translation.

على الرمال ، : رغبة الأجاج ، والمحار
وما تبقى من عظام بئس غريق
من المهاجرين ظل يشرب الردى
من لجة الخليج والقرار

The Gulf casts its abundant gifts on the sand:

Foam, shells and the bones of an emigrant

Who drank death

At the bottom of the Gulf⁵²

In the fifth section of “The Waste Land”, “What the Thunder Said”, Eliot employs the motif of rain as a symbol of life and fertility:

The shouting and the crying
Prison and place and reverberation
Of thunder of spring over distant mountains
.....
Where the hermit-thrush sings in the pine trees
Drip drop drip drop drop drop drop
But there is no water. (325-327, 356-358)

Comparing Eliot’s above-lines with Al-Sayyab’s following lines, the intertextuality between them is apparent:

كأن أقواس السحاب تشرب الغيوم
وقطرةً فقطرةً تذوب في المطر...
وكركر الأطفال في عرائش الكروم ،
ودغدغت صمت العصافير على الشجر

⁵²Translated by Abdullah al-Udhari, *Modern Poetry of the Arab World* (Middlesex: Penguin, 1986) 32.

أنشودة المطر...

مطر...

مطر...

مطر...

As if the rainbow drinks the clouds
 And drop by drop melts in rain
 And children babble under vine trellises
 And the song of rain
 Tickles the silence of birds on the trees
 Rain . . .
 Rain . . .
 Rain⁵³ . . .

Al-Sayyab and Eliot employ the motif of water negatively. In the opening lines of “The Waste Land”, Eliot depicts the season of rain as the cruelest month: “April is the cruellest month, breeding / Lilacs out of the dead land, mixing / Memory and desire, stirring / Dull roots with spring rain”. Eliot entitles the fourth section of “The Waste Land” ‘Death by Water’. Similarly, Al-Sayyab displays a negative image of water when he says:

I cry to the Gulf, “O Gulf,
 O giver of shells and death”

⁵³Taken from Al-Sayyab’s poem, “Unshudat al-Matar” [The Song of Rain]. Translated by Issa J. Boullata in his book *Modern Arab Poets 1950-1975*. This poem has been translated fourteen times. Abdullah al-Udhari, Lena Jayyusi and Christopher Middleton, and Desmond O’ Grady translated “Unshudat al-Matar” as [Rain Song]. Issa Boullata, Nadia Bishai, Anonymous, Arie Loya, and Mursi Saad El-Din have translated it as [The Song of Rain]. John Mikhail Asfour and Basima Bezirgan and Elizabeth Fernea translated it as [Song of The Rain]. Bassam K. Frangieh translated it as Song of Rain. Terry DeYoung translated it as [Hymn of the Rain]. Abdel Salama translated it as [Hymn to Rain].

The echo comes back
 Like sobs,
 “O Gulf,
 O giver of shells and death.”
 I can almost hear Iraq gathering thunder
 And storing up lightning in mountains and plains.⁵⁴

Intertextuality between Al-Sayyab’s poem “Madina Bila Matar” [City without Rain] and Eliot’s “The Waste Land” is clear when the following lines are compared:

و لكن مرّت الأعوام ، كثيراً ما حسبنّاها ،
 بلا مطر .. ولو قطرة
 ولا زهر .. ولو زهرة
 بلا ثمر - كأنّ نخيلنا الجرداء أنصاب أقمناها
 لنذبل تحتها و نموت .

But years have passed, so many we have not counted them
 With no rain- not even a drop,
 With no flowers- not even flower.
 With no fruits: as if our barren palms were idols we erected.
 So that we might wither and die under them.⁵⁵

Al-Sayyab’s above lines are relatively similar to Eliot’s lines in the fourth section of “The Waste Land”:

Here is no water but only rock
 Rock and no water and the sandy road

⁵⁴Issa J. Boullata , trans and ed, *Modern Arab Poets 1950-1975* (London: Heinemann, 1976) 8.

⁵⁵Translated by Issa J. Boullata, *Modern Arab Poets 1950-1975* (London: Heinemann, 1976) 4.

.....
 Here one can neither stand nor lie nor sit

There is not even silence in the mountains

But dry sterile thunder without rain

There is not even solitude in the mountains

But red sullen faces sneer and snarl

If there were water. (331 - 332, 340 - 345)

In his poem "Ru'ya fi Am 1956" [Vision in 1956] Al-Sayyab quotes Eliot's title "The Waste Land" when he says

أي حشد من وجوة كالحات ،

من أكف كالتراب

نبتها الآجر والفولاذ كالأرض اليباب ؟

Which crowd of gloomy faces,

Of hands like the dust,

Its plant is shingles and steel like the waste land?⁵⁶

In her book *Trends and Movements in Modern Arabic Poetry*, Salma Khadra Jayyusi states that Al-Sayyab's lines: "I cry out till the graves moan with the echo of my voice. My voice is sand and wind" are similar to Eliot's lines of his poem "The Hollow Men" in which Eliot says:

Our dried voices, when

We whisper together

Are quiet and meaningless

As wind in dry grass. (5-8)

⁵⁶My translation.

Intertextuality is also discernable between Al-Sayyab and the Spanish poet, Federico García Lorca and the English poetess *Edith Sitwell*. According to Ihsan Abbas and Salma Khadhra Jayyusi, Al-Sayyab borrows some of his poetic images from the Spanish poet, Garcia Lorca, and the English poet, Edith Sitwell. For instance, in his poem “Al-Nahr wa Al-Mawt” [The River and Death], Al-Sayyab says:

Bells of a tower lost in the sea bed
 Dusk in the trees, water in the jars
 spilling rain bells
 crystals melting with a sigh

 My death bells ring and shake my veins.⁵⁷

The poetic images of the above lines are relatively similar to Lorca’s poetic images of his poem, “Ballad of the Small Plaza”, in which Lorca says:

A peal from the bell-tower,
 lost in the dimness.

 It’s filled with light, is
 my heart of silk, and
 with bells that are lost,
 with bees and with lilies⁵⁸

Al-Sayyab also borrows from Lorca images of the moon when says:

I want to peer across the crests of the hills ,

⁵⁷Translated by Lena Jayyusi and Christopher Middleton, *Modern Arabic Poetry: An Anthology* (New York: Columbia UP, 1987) 435-436.

⁵⁸8/April/ 2010. <[http://www. poetryintranslation.com/PITBR/Spanish/Lorca.htm](http://www.poetryintranslation.com/PITBR/Spanish/Lorca.htm)>.

catch sight of the moon
 as it wades between your banks, planting shadows filling baskets
 with water and fish and flowers .
 I want to plunge into you, following the moon ,
 hear the pebbles hiss in your depths ,
 Sibilance of a thousand birds in the trees .
 Are you a river or a forest of tears?
 I want to peer across the crests of the hills,
 Catch sight of moon
 As it wades between your banks, planting shadows.⁵⁹

Similarly, in his poem “Romance Sonámbulo”, Lorca says:

High verandas of the moonlight,
 where I hear the sound of waters.
 Now they climb, the two companions,
 up there to the high veranda,
 letting fall a trail of blood drops,
 letting fall a trail of tears.
 On the morning rooftops,
 trembled, the small tin lanterns.
 A thousand tambourines of crystal
 wounded the light of daybreak.⁶⁰

In his poem “Tammuz Jaikur” [Tammuz of Jaikur], Al-Sayyab says “Boar’s tusk

⁵⁹Translated by Lena Jayyusi and Christopher Middleton, *Modern Arabic Poetry: An Anthology* (New York: Columbia UP, 1987) 436.

⁶⁰8/April/ 2010. <<http://www.poetryintranslation.com/PITBR/Spanish/Lorca.htm>>.

rends my hand". This line is similar to Lorca's lines in "The Death of Tony Camborio", "He slashed their leather boots / with the tusks of a wild boar" For instance, Al-Sayyab in his poem "Ru'ya Fukai"⁶¹ [From Fukai's Vision] says:

أهم بالرحيل في "غرناطة" الغجر ؟
فاخضرت الرياح ، والغدير ، والقمر ؟

Did Gypsy in Granada intend to depart?

Then, the winds, the brook and the moon became green?⁶²

In the notes of the poem "Ru'ya Fukai" [From Fukai's Vision], Al-Sayyab mentions that this verse was quoted from a poem by the Spanish poet Lorca, the gypsy poet, but Al-Sayyab does not say the exact poem. Tracing Lorca's poems, the words of gypsy, wind, and green are mentioned in Lorca's poems: "Romance of the sleepwalker" and "The gypsy and the Wind":

Green, as I love you, greenly.

Green the wind, and green the branches.

.....

green the flesh, and green the tresses,

with eyes of frozen silver.

Green, as I love you, greenly.

Beneath the moon of the gypsies.⁶³ (1-2, 7-10)

And in his poem "The gypsy and the Wind", Lorca says:

Precosia, run, Precosia

⁶¹Fukai was the secretary of the diocese at the Jesuit mission in Hiroshima.

⁶²My translation.

⁶³29/ 08/ 2010 <http://users.telenet.be/gaston.d.haese/lorca_in_english.html>.

Or the green wind will catch you! (36-37)

In his notes on the poem “Ru'ya Fukai” [From Fukai’s Vision], Al-Sayyab mentions that the following seven lines are literally quoted from Edith Sitwell’s Poem “Lullaby”:

ورغم أن العالم استسر واندثر ،
 ما زال طائر الحديد يذرع السماء ،
 وفي قرارة المحيط يعقد القرى
 أهداب طفلك اليتيم – حيث لا غناء
 الا صراخ "البابيون" : " زادك الثرى ،
 فازحف على الاربع ... فالحضيض والعلاء
 سيان والحياة كالنفاء !"

Though the world has vanished and gone,
 The steel bird is still flying in the sky,
 And at the depths of the ocean, hospitality is conducted
 By the eyelashes of your orphan child- where no singing
 But the cry of the “Babioun”: “the soil is your food,
 Crawl on all fours...the bottom and the top are same
 And life is like death!”⁶⁴

Comparing the following lines of Edith Sitwell’s poem “Lullaby” with Al-Sayyab’s above lines, intertextuality is discernable:

Though the world has slipped and gone,
 Sounds my loud discordant cry
 Like the steel birds’ song on high:
 ‘Still one thing is left- the Bone!’

⁶⁴My translation.

Then out danced the Babioun.
 She sat in the hollow of the sea-
 A socket whence the eye's put out-
 She sang to the child a lullaby. (1- 8)

In Al-Sayyab's poem "Madinat al-Sindabad" [The City of Sindbad], the following lines are similar to Sitwell's line from her poem *Lullaby* in which she says: "Under the Judas-colored sun", whereas Al-Sayyab says:

Is this my city? With injured domes
 In which red-robed Judas
 Set the dogs on the cradles
 Of my little brothers . . . and houses. (Khouri 103)

In his poem "Marha Ghailan" [Well Don Ghailan] Al-Sayyab says:

والنار تصرخ يا ورود تفتحي ولد الربيع

And the fire cries: oh roses, blossom, spring was born.⁶⁵

Al-Sayyab twists the image used by Sitwell in her poem where she says:

The rose upon the wall cries I am the voice of fire.

Intertextuality between Al-Sayyab and Edith Sitwell is noticed while comparing Al-Saab's "Unshudat al-Matar" [Rain Song] with Sitwell's poem "Still Falls the Rain". Al-Sayyab's last line of his poem "Rain Song" "It is still raining"⁶⁶ is analogous to Sitwell's opening line "Still falls the rain"

من يفهم الأرض أن الصغار

يضيئون بالحفرة الباردة ؟

⁶⁵Ibid.

⁶⁶Translated by Abdullah al-Udhari, *Modern Poetry of the Arab World* (Middlesex:Penguin, 1986) 32.

Who would inform the earth that children
Are restless in the cold hole?⁶⁷

These two lines are drawn from Al-Sayyab's poem "Al-Aslihah wa-al-Atfal" [Weapons and Children]. In his notes on this poem, Al-Sayyab mentions that he alludes to Edith Sitwell's poem "A Mother to her Dead Childe", in which Sitwell says:

The earth is so old
She can only think of darkness and sleep, forgetting
That children are restless like the small spring shadows. (18- 20)

4.2.3. Abd al-Sabur vs Eliot: Common Similarities

Like Eliot, Abd al-Sabur rationalizes the significance of poetic drama and claims that poetry is the only genre which possesses the right to be on theater. Later, Abd al-Sabur rethinks his argument of giving priority to poetic drama over prose drama. He states that the language of the exalted prose on the theater is like the language of poetry. Abd al-Sabur adds that 'poetic' is a momentous device for theatre; 'poetic' does not mean poetizing because many prose dramas are more affecting than some verse dramas.

Abd al-Sabur utilizes Eliot's thoughts and techniques directly, which is noticed in his poetic drama. In the history of Arabic literature, poetic drama was not as prevalent as lyrical and epic poetry. Because of the acculturation and hybridity between Arabic and Western cultures, Arabic drama began to occupy its eminent place among other Arabic genres. It was Beirut which witnessed the first birth of modern Arab theater in 1848 by the dramatist Marun Al-Naqqash with his first play *Al-Bakhil* [The Miser]. But, *Al-Muru'ah wa al-Wafa* [Chivalry and Faithfulness, 1876] is the first Arabic poetic drama

⁶⁷My translation.

composed by the Lebanese writer Khalil Al-Yazih in 1876. According to M. M. Badawi, the Egyptian poet Ahmed Shawqi was the first to write poetic plays in Arabic because earlier attempts in Arabic drama by writers such as Marun Al-Naqqash, Salim Al-Naqqash and Abu Khalil Al-Qabbani were composed in a mixture of prose and verse.⁶⁸ Shawqi's poetic drama such as *Masra' Kilubatar* [The Fall of Cleopatra, 1928] and *Ali Bayk Al-Kabir* [Ali Bey The Great, 1932] were composed in pure verse. However, Abd al-Sabur's poetic drama is regarded as the real commencement of modern Arabic verse drama. Theoretically, both Abd al-Sabur and Eliot prefer poetic drama to prose drama, and practically, they composed their plays in verse. In his essay "Poetry and Drama", Eliot states, "I have before my eyes a kind of mirage of the perfection of verse drama, which would be a design of human action and of words, such as to present at once the two aspects of dramatic and of musical order." (Eliot 87)

Abd al-Sabur also resembles Eliot in selecting the subject and the theme of the poetic play. For instance, Abd al-Sabur's *Ma'sat Al-Hallaj* [Tragedy of Al-Hallaj, 1964], which was translated by the Lebanese writer as *Murder in Baghdad*, is his first poetic play which appears relatively similar to Eliot's *Murder in the Cathedral*. In addition to the similarity between the titles, the theme of each deals with a story of murdering a historical and religious figure. Abd al-Sabur's *Ma'sat Al-Hallaj* [Tragedy of Al-Hallaj] revolves around the execution of the historical Sufi figure Abu Al-Mughith al-Husain Ibn Mansur, known as Al-Hallaj, in Baghdad in 922 on the charge of heresy. But the events and the dialogues of Abd al-Sabur's poetic play are not real. Eliot's *Murder in the Cathedral* revolves around the Archbishop's murder, Thomas Becket of Canterbury, who was killed by the knights of King Henry II in 1170 on the charge of undermining the

⁶⁸M. M. Badawi, *Modern Arabic Drama in Egypt* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1987) 207.

king's authority. Reading Eliot's poetic drama, and Al-Hallaj's life, inspired Abd al-Sabur to compose his poetic play *Ma'sat Al-Hallaj* in which he criticizes the Arabic totalitarian regimes. He criticizes the alliance between the state and religion against opposition. Abd al-Sabur attempts to present Al-Hallaj as the Eliot's Thomas Becket and not the historical figure, Al-Hallaj.⁶⁹ The following lines are taken from Abd al-Sabur's *Ma'sat Al-Hallaj*, act one:

مقدم مجموعة الصوفية : كان يقول
 إذا غسلت بالدماء هامتي وأغصني
 فقد توضأت وضوء الأنبياء
 كان يريد أن يموت ، كي يعود للسماء
 كأنه طفل سماوي شريد
 قد ضل عن أبيه في متاهة المساء
 كان يقول :
 كأن من يقتلني محقق مشيئتي
 ومنفذ إرادة الرحمن

He used to say:

“If my head and limbs were washed with blood,
 Then I would be cleaned as were the prophets.”
 He wished for death, he longed to return to heaven,
 As though he were a heavenly child who was lost,
 A child who had strayed from his Father in the
 Dark of night.

He used to say:

⁶⁹Ibrahim Abd al-Hameed, *Maqalat fi Al-Naqd Al-Adabi* [Essays on the Literary Criticism], vol. 3.

“He who kills me fulfils my wish
And that of God.”⁷⁰

Abd al-Sabur’s lines are similar to Eliot’s lines in his *Murder in the Cathedral*, where the fourth knight justifies the killing of Thomas Becket:

I have unimpeachable evidence
To the effect that before he left France clearly prophesied,
In the presence of numerous witnesses, that he had not long
To live, and that he would be killed in England. He used
Every means of provocation; from his conduct, step by
Step, there can be no inference except that he had determined
Upon a death by martyrdom. Even at the last, he
Could have given us reason: you have seen how he evaded
Our questions. And when he had deliberately exasperated
Us beyond human endurance, he could still have easily escaped. (559-568)

The study does not aim to illustrate the details of Eliot’s *Murder in the Cathedral* and Abd al-Sabur’s *Ma’sat Al-Hallaj*, but just refers to the hybridity between Abd al-Sabur’s literary works and Eliot’s.

The commonality between Abd al-Sabur and T. S Eliot is their composing poetic drama as well as the use of allusions in their poems, but the use of myth is not prevalent in Abd al-Sabur’s poetry. In his poem “Al-Shaye Al-Hazeen” [The Sad Object] Abd al-Sabur implies the myth of rebirth when he says:

فَأَنْتَ لَوْ دَفَنْتَ جَنَّةَ بَارِضٍ

⁷⁰Khalil I Semaan, trans, *Murder in Baghdad* (Ma’sat Al-Hallaj), Salah Abd al-Sabur (Leiden: Brill, 1972) 7.

لأورقت جذورها ، وأينعت ثمار

If you have buried a corpse in a ground,

Its root will sprout and will bear fruits.⁷¹

Abd al-Sabur's lines are similar to Eliot's lines in "The Waste Land" in which Eliot says:

That corpse you planted last year in your garden,

Has it begun to sprout? Will it bloom this year? (71- 72).

The following lines display some similarities between Abd al-Sabur's works and Eliot's.

For instance, in his poem "Al-Huzn" [Sorrow], Abd al-Sabur says:

حزن تمدد في المدينة

كاللص في جوف السكينة

Sorrow spread out in the City

Like the thief inside the calmness.⁷²

Abd al-Sabur's line "sorrow spread out in the city" is relatively similar to Eliot's lines in "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock":

When the evening is spread out against the sky

Like a patient etherized upon a table. (2-3)

In Abd al-Sabur's poem "Lahn" [Melody], some lines are similar to Eliot's as it is apparent in the following:

جارتني ! لست أميراً

لا ، ولست المضحك الممراح في قصر الأمير

سأريك العجب المعجب في شمس النهار

أنا لا أملك ما يملأ كفي طعاماً

⁷¹My translation.

⁷²Ibid.

و بخديك من النعمة تفاح وسكر

O, my (fem.) neighbour I am not a prince

Nor I am the jester in the prince's palace

I will show you the admirable wonder in the daylight

I do not have what fills my hand with food

And in your cheeks, there are apples and sweet.⁷³

In parallel, Eliot says in his poem "The Love song of J. Alfred Prufrock":

No! I am not prince Hamlet, nor was meant to be;

Am an attendant lord, one that will do.

.....

At times, indeed, almost ridiculous

Almost, at times, the fool. (111-112, 118-119)

Eliot's verse 'For Thine is the Kingdom', drawn from his poem "The Hollow Men", is similar to a title by Abd Al-Sabur "Al-Mulku Lak" [For You is the Kingdom], in which this phrase is repeated six times:

وقالت لي الارض ((الملك لك))

تموت الظلال ويحيا الوهج

الملك لك

الملك لك

الملك لك

.....

الملك لك

.....

⁷³Ibid.

الملك لك .

And the earth said to me ((For you is the kingdom))

Die shadow and long live the glare

For you is the kingdom

For you is the kingdom

For you is the kingdom

.....

For you is the kingdom

.....

For you is the kingdom.⁷⁴

In his poem “Ta'amulat Lailiyah” [Nocturnal Meditation], Abd al-Sabur says:

الظلمة تهوي نحو الشرفة

في عربتها السوداء

صلصلة العجلات الوهمية

تتردد في الأنحاء

Darkness falls towards the balcony

In its black chariot

Sound of the illusory wheels

Echoes in all the directions.⁷⁵

Abd al-Sabur's above lines are similar to Eliot's lines in “The Waste Land”:

But at my back from time to time I hear

The sound of horns and motors . . . (196-197)

⁷⁴My translation.

⁷⁵Ibid.

In the last section of Abd al-Sabur's poem "Ta'amulat Lailiyah" [Nocturnal Meditation], he repeats the word 'nothing' several times, as Eliot repeats the same word in the second section of his poem "The Waste Land". Abd al-Sabur says:

لا شيء يعينك . . . لا شيء يعينك
 لا شيء يعينك . . . لا شيء يعين
 لا شيء يعينك ، لا شيء
 لا شيء يعينك
 لا شيء
 . . . لا

Nothing helps you ... Nothing helps you

Nothing helps you . . . Nothing helps

Nothing helps you, nothing

Nothing helps you

Nothing

No⁷⁶ . . .

The above lines composed by Abd al-Sabur are compared with Eliot's lines:

Nothing again nothing

'Do

You know nothing? Do you see nothing? Do you remember

Nothing'? (20- 23)

In his poem "Baudelaire", Abd al-Sabur quotes Eliot's line from "The Waste Land" as it is without rendering it into Arabic:

Hypocrite lecteur

⁷⁶Ibid.

Mon semblable, mon frere

شاعر أنت والكون نثر

Poet you are, and the universe is prose.⁷⁷

Abd al-Sabur quotes the last line of Eliot's "The Burial of the Dead", the first section of "The Waste Land", and divides it into two lines while Eliot composes it in one line:

You ! Hypocrite lecteur ! —Mon semblable, — mon frere ! (76)

The aforementioned patterns display the intertextuality between Abd al-Sabur and T. S. Eliot. This does not attribute that Abd al-Sabur is subordinate to Eliot. According to some postmodern theorists such as the French theorists Julia Kristeva and Roland Barthes there are no original texts. Therefore, the similarities between the works of Al-Sayyab and Abd al-Sabur on one side and T. S. Eliot on the other side is a kind of acculturation and hybridity between the two cultures of Arabic and English. In his essay "The Death of The Author", Roland Barthes (1915-1980) writes:

We know now that a text is not a line of words releasing a single 'theological' meaning (the 'message' of the Author-God) but a multidimensional space in which a variety of writings, none of them original, blend and clash. The text is a tissue of quotations drawn from the innumerable centres of culture . . . the writer can only imitate a gesture that is always anterior, never original. His only power is to mix writings, to counter the ones with the others, in such a way as never to rest on any one of them. Did he wish to express himself, he ought at least to know that the inner 'thing' he thinks to 'translate' is only a ready-formed dictionary,

⁷⁷Ibid.

its words only explainable through other words, and so on indefinitely.

(Lodge 148)

Unlike Abd al-Sabur, Al-Sayyab utilizes Eliot's poetics indirectly. He is familiar with employing myths and allusions more than Abd al-Sabur.

CONCLUSION

This thesis deals with a significant but controversial subject that is poetic modernism. It is a comparative study between Arabic and Western modernisms, highlighting the convergences and departures between them. There are two views of defining the term ‘modernism’: one is that ‘modernism’ is a violation of norm which attempts to break with the tradition. It rejects the traditional values and encourages creativity and subjectivity. The other position is that ‘modernism’ is a reaction to the cruel urban societies, industrialization, and absence of the human values. It is an aesthetic criticism to modernity.

From the Western perspective, modernism is a development in the Western society which places man as the center of the world who judges all things on it instead of adhering to the past as a standard of judgments. It includes the movements in art, architecture and literature, which break with classical and traditional norms. Generally, modernism is a period, style, and genre. However, Susan Stanford, defines modernism as a global tendency in art and literature and not confined to the West.

From the Arabic perspective, modernism is an awareness of life and existence. It is a revolt against tradition; it is a violation of the political, ethical, and cultural sovereignty. It rejects the ideal standards of the past. Modernism is linked with innovation and does not belong to a specific time because it is a continuation of modernisms that appeared earlier. Arabic modernism is a new intellectual and philosophic vision of the self and the universe.

Some Arab and Western thinkers use the terms ‘modernism’ and ‘modernity’ interchangeably. Others use the term ‘modernity’ for technology and social life, and the

term 'modernism' as an aesthetic term for the social and ideological context. This study preferred the term 'modernism' in dealing with Arabic and English poetic modernism.

The study demonstrates that Arabic poetic modernism is a violation of the poetics of Arab traditional poetry to create a novel poetics along with a novel vision of the world and human. Historically, the seeds of Arabic poetic modernism emerged early in the Abbasid period by some Arab poets who contravened the traditional poetics and the religious values and norms of the community they lived in, like Abu Nuwas, Abu Tammam and Al-Ma'arri. Due to consequent calamities that have been occurring since the 13th century till the present in the Arab world, Arabic modernism retreated to reappear in the 20th century. Arabic traditional poetry still exists and Arabic modernist poetry did not replace it. In other words, the 20th century was not an exclusive period for Arabic modernism, but also other Arabic literary trends such as neoclassicism and romanticism emerged and opposed modernism. Unlike the Western literary movements, the Arab neoclassic, romantic and modernist poets relatively lived in the same period such as Ahmad Shauqi, Hafiz Ibrahim, Al-Jawahiri, Al-Rusafi, Mohammed Mahmoud Al-Zubairi, Khalil Mutran, Ilyas Abu Shabakah, Ali Mahmud Taha, Badr Shakir Al-Sayyab, Lewis Awad, Salah Abd Al-Sabour, Adonis, and Abd al-Wahab Al-Bayyati.

This study attempts to attribute the renewal of Arabic modernist poetry to the necessity of change as a natural process in human life, and to the increase of knowledge and epistemology that Arab modernist poets acquired, as well as to the acculturation with the West. In this sense, Arabic poetic modernism is not an offspring of the Western poetic modernism as some Arab writers and scholars argue. The liberation of Arabic poetry from the traditional poetics was inspired by the revolutions against the oligarchic

regimes in the Arab world; and the renewal of themes and techniques were inspired by the rise of progressive thoughts and parties against the reactionary and conservative parties. Therefore, Arabic modernist text is a product of its socio-political contexts. Both Arab and Western modernist writers hold discordant views on tradition. Some Arab and Western modernist writers attempt to erase tradition and strive for a radical departure from the tradition. Others aspire to recover tradition and save bits of the past from destruction. The third group of modernist writers hold ambivalent responses towards it. Eliot is regarded as a conservative while Al-Sayyab and Abd al-Sabur were progressives. Al-Sayyab and Abd al-Sabur were inspired by socialism while T. S. Eliot was inspired by imperialism.

Though there were cultural and ideological differences between Al-Sayyab, Abd al-Sabur and T. S. Eliot, they relatively had similar orientation and inclination towards innovation and renewal. They handled similar themes like barrenness, rebirth, alienation, city and death; utilized the same techniques: ironies, metaphors, symbols, myths and other devices of expression to create a modernist poem. Arab modernist poets display three positions on the city: the first is an absolute rejection of the city; the second position is at ambivalence, and the third position celebrates the city.

Like Eliot, Al-Sayyab and Abd al-Sabur wrote innovative poetry marked by deep visions on human and life. Focus on the subject of rebirth was common between Eliot and Al-Sayyab, while Abd al-Sabur did not deal with the myths of rebirth. Therefore, Eliot and Al-Sayyab were regarded optimistic poets. Both Eliot and Al-Sayyab employ the motif of water as a symbol of rebirth and rejuvenation. While Abd al-Sabur seems to be a pessimistic poet. Al-Sayyab, Abd al-Sabur and Eliot connected the past with the

present. Al-Sayyab alluded to the ancient myths as well as to the Arabic historical figures, but Abd al-Sabur was not interested in mythologies. Instead, Abd al-Sabur used historical figures to link the past with the present. Similarly, Eliot quoted from the ancient literary works and employed ancient myths.

T. S. Eliot was aware of the personality and impersonality concepts in poetry, but he could not escape from being impersonal in his poetry. Abd al-Sabur and Eliot were similar in rationalizing the significance of the poetic drama. They claim that poetry is the only genre, which possesses the right to be on the theater. Later, Abd al-Sabur rethinks his argument that gave priority to the poetic drama over the prose drama. He states that the language of the exalted prose on the theater is like the language of poetry.

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