

REJUVENATING T.S. ELIOT'S *THE WASTE LAND*

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- 112 English poetry remained for decades a prime component of the programmes in departments of English at Arab universities, especially when some Arab countries were under British colonial rule. For relatively long periods of time, many acclaimed Arab poets studied William Shakespeare, Edmund Spenser, John Milton, Ben Jonson, the Romantic poets, and many others. Some of them also studied, or read, English modernists, including T.S. Eliot. Among these Arab poets, a new phenomenon appeared: it became a mode that a poet's name was linked to a western 'master' and a Western poem might have, for example, created a real change in the literary reception of an Arabic poem. An obvious instance is T.S. Eliot's impact, felt almost everywhere in the Arab world. His poem, *The Waste Land*, has been the most celebrated poem in several Arab countries, especially Iraq, Egypt, and Lebanon. For decades, the poem was the centre of literary attraction for quite a good number of Arab poets and critics. In addition to fascinating those who could read it in English, the poem's translated version, rendered into Arabic by many translators, engaged the minds of young poets who were yearning for modern models in poetry. They found in Eliot's poem stylistic innovations that could reconfigure, in Arabic, the model capacities of poetics. This explains why *The Waste Land* has been translated into Arabic many times: the first translation, made by Tawfiq Sa'igh, was published in the leading literary journal *Al-Adāb* in January 1955. Other translations followed: by Nabila Ibrahim (1959) and Luis 'Awad (1962), and "by the middle of the [sixth] decade [of the twentieth century], the list of Eliot's translators was distinguished by at least a dozen prominent names in Arabic poetry" (Asfour 49). The translations of the poem were not without a context: the corpus of criticism it received may have been beyond expectation and thus another translation was published in Baghdad in 1980 by Abdul-Wahid Lu'lu'a. After a few years, the edition ran out of print, and a second one appeared in 1986,

which soon ran out of print again. The translator noted that the relatively short time during which the editions of the translated poem ran out of print indicated the serious attention paid by Arab readers to Eliot's poem. In 1995, this translation appeared in a revised edition and the book, *T.S. Eliot, al-Ard al-Yabab, ash-Sha'ir wal-Qasida*, which contained an extended review of the poem's criticisms, indicated—once again according to Lu'lu'a—that the poem was still widely read by the Arabs.

Besides, Eliot's poem has always been considered one of the major factors which contributed to modernizing Arabic poetry and this explains why many critics attribute the revolutionary change in Arabic poetic form brought about in the 1940s and 1950s to this poem in particular (Jabra, "Modern Arabic Literature" 76). In this regard, a significant role was especially played by the Beirut-based literary journals, *Al-Adāb*¹ and *Shi'r*² in the 1950s and 1960s, after the impact of Eliot's poetry reached its peak in the Arab world.

This significant position *The Waste Land* occupied may be attributed mainly to the fact that T.S. Eliot offered the stylistic, prosodic and thematic freedom Arabic poetry needed; he provided to many Arab poets a form that "permits the poets to treat their subject unhampered by the rhetorical conventions" (Asfour 49). However, taking into consideration the fact that any literary pulsate throbbing in the West usually resonates in the Arab countries, one may also think that the attention paid to the poem may have also reflected the poem's unprecedented critical reception in the West.³

The rise of Badr Shakir As-Sayāb⁴ and the publication in 1954 of his masterpiece, *Unshudat al-Matar (Hymn of Rain)*, undoubtedly marked a new poetic trend in Arabic poetry, though the poem also highlighted a beginning of an interminable and tiresome debate about T.S. Eliot in the Arab world. *Unshudat al-Matar* has, since the 1950s, received a great deal of criticism, focused mainly on its new style, themes and images (Niyazi) and on its 'Eliotic' features. Its unprecedented success was attributed to its unprecedented rendering of the theme of rain in the context of the rituals of fertility. Although this theme secured the poem a focal position on the Arabic literary map, a considerable number of Arab critics have enthusiastically contended that many of As-Sayāb's techniques and themes were acquired mainly from T.S. Eliot. This claim was usually followed by a reference to *The Waste Land* and to its influence on As-Sayāb's masterpiece. The impression, for example, that As-Sayāb's "writing in the taf'ila form [i.e. varying the number of taf'ila, or feet, in the poetic line] was only an ornamental development of the Arabic poem, prompted by the influence of literary Western models" (Khouri 28), paved the way for many critics to claim that *Hymn of Rain* had the styles and themes of T.S. Eliot. Writings of several Arab critics, such as Issa Boullata and Simon Jarji,⁵ have shown an obvious inclination towards linking As-Sayāb's poem to James Frazer's *The Golden Bough*, Eliot's *The Waste Land*, and Sitwell's *Still Falls the Rain* and *The Canticle of the Rose*. However, some of these critics concentrated in their writings, particularly, on the theme of rain, which—they thought—came to As-Sayāb from his English 'master', T.S. Eliot.

Muhammad Shahin is an obvious example of these critics. In an extensive reading of Eliot's and As-Sayâb's masterpieces, Shahin insists that "[t]hrough a close reading of *The Waste Land* and *Hymn of Rain*, we find that As-Sayâb made use of...the last part of [Eliot's] poem, *What the Thunder Said*" (22). He believes that the Iraqi poet found in *The Waste Land* his personal tool to tell of the shattered reality "at moments of the most acute pain when the soul gets purified...and managed to seize those moments and subdue their rhythm to his own needs and potentials" (23).

Shahin further elaborates that the two poems have many features in common: the internal rhythm and the critical moment "which gathers in the poem two close inter-mixed situations: rain's cessation and waiting for rain, the aridity due to the rain's cessation and the fertility awaited for" (23-4). Here lies the affinity between the two poems, Shahin believes. He also argues that since Eliot found in the myth of rain a medium for expressing the crisis of his society, As-Sayâb had all the reasons to find in rain a more appropriate medium for a different kind of expression. In As-Sayâb's country, Iraq, rain's cessation poses an immediate danger threatening people's lives, and this—according to Shahin—is what probably invited As-Sayâb to choose, from among all the myths and rhetorical borrowings that fill *The Waste Land*, what is related to rain.

This 'Eliotic' element is also considered by Daizera Saqqal. In her article, "Al-Ard al-kharab wa-sh-Shi'r al-'Arabi al-mu'asir", she considers "*Hymn of Rain* as one of the poems where the influence of Eliot appears more obvious than in any other one" (123). This is particularly noticed, she believes, with "the 'waiting for rain' theme of *What the Thunder Said*."

These two viewpoints of Shahin and Saqqal stand out as examples that mainly concentrate on what these critics find in many of As-Sayâb's poems as reflections of Eliot's own 'stamp'. They seem to have ignored the remarkable way in which As-Sayâb handled his themes. Borrowing styles or localizing patterns do not rule out originality because "it will not harm a writer, no matter how ingenious he is...that he assimilates the [literary] productions of others to produce something typically his" (Hilal 17; my translation). Moreover, creative ideas, to borrow M.G. Hilal's words, have for hundreds of years had their roots in the one common tradition of humanity. Accordingly, the idea remains that great writers and poets, like Shakespeare and Eliot himself, integrated in their writings many references and allusions because:

The possibility of each literature renewing itself, proceeding to new creative activity, making new discoveries in the use of words, depends on...its ability to receive and assimilate influences from abroad. (Eliot, *Notes* 114)

Eliot could not be seen as being a poor poet just because he had many literary allusions in his poems. Likewise, it is not logical to argue that Shakespeare was a poor playwright just because he sometimes used stories, thoughts, and verses from Italian and French poets or from older compatriots. The point is that:

What we appreciate in Shakespeare is not that he borrowed extensively (if this is so) but

rather something else: that he succeeded in creating unique and coherent works of art of all these borrowings and impulses. The moral of this is that one should have a less moralistic view of influence: it need not be a fault or a sign of weakness to be influenced by others. (Hermerén 130-31)

Drawing upon this, the other side of the argument gets momentum. In her examination of *Hymn of Rain*, Reta 'Awad emphasizes As-Sayâb's new techniques, images and themes which were "a qualitative turning point in his poetry, in particular, and in contemporary Arabic poetry, in general" ('Awad 33). According to her, two of the most important themes in the poem are the expression of a completed cycle of fertility, as recorded in the ancient Mesopotamian myth of Tammuz, and the analogy to the revival of the nation. She believes As-Sayâb discovers the life-death myth when he turns back to ancient traditions of his own people. In them, he finds that "woman-mother, nation and land are associated" ('Awad 33-4), and because of this he is absolutely certain of the rebirth of his nation, as if he refuses to believe that death was an end. His mother, serving as an example, will be resurrected because she is unified with the land and with the rain:

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لا بد أن تعود
وإن تهامس الرفاق أنها هناك
في جانب التل تنام نومة اللحود

She must come back
Though his comrades whispered she was there
On the hillside sleeping a sleep of graves

(*Hymn of Rain*, lines 28-30)

The speaker's mother would be revived as she united herself with the land:

تسفف من ترابها وتشرب المطر

Eating earth and drinking rain

(*Hymn of Rain*, line 31)

By so doing, As-Sayâb emphasizes the central theme of the death-life circle after he renders it from his own national past. For him, darkness, barren branches, aridity and hunger stand for death as opposed to light, blossoming, and rain that stand for rebirth. He focuses on rain because it is not confined to its semantic connotations: "it is a symbol of life, which rain gives to the awaiting land" ('Awad 35).

In view of this reading, As-Sayâb's attempt to incorporate into the poem the life-death cycle, which constituted an element of the ancient waste land myth of Mesopotamia, diminishes the notion of Western influence in this very respect.

Another similar reading stands out. Elias Khouri, in his book, *Dirasat fi Naqd ash-Shi'r* [*Studies in Poetry Criticism*], suggests examining *Hymn of Rain* in the context of the real change that took place in As-Sayâb's poetry. Like several other writers, Elias

Khouri says that the poem crowns the Iraqi poet's experimentation and is, therefore, "one of the first modern poems in our Arabic poetry, setting off from the [ancient Iraqi] Tammuzi symbol" (29). The first area to focus on is his emphasis that the poem fuses the Tammuzi symbol and the realistic dimension of the theme. The "splendid way" in which the poem "wears the symbol" makes the presence of the myth in each word noticeable, even though there is no direct reference to it (30). This is yet more stressed when Nazeer El-Azma highlights several remarkable differences and fewer instances of similarity between *The Waste Land* and *Hymn of Rain*. If Eliot reveals in his poem a complex network of relationships in a context of the rituals of vegetation, his main emphasis is a waterless-and-barren-land vision, which stands for a Western view of a civilization on the verge of collapse. Though water seems for Eliot to be a symbol of life-giving and fertility, his speaker in the poem suffers frustration when he feels many times that there is no hope for reviving his waste land, "since there is no water":

- 116 Where the hermit-thrush sings in the pine trees
 Drip drop drip drop drop drop
 But there is no water.

(*The Waste Land*, lines 357-9)

In this framework, Eliot's influence on As-Sayâb, to borrow El-Azma's words, is restricted to the symbolic system. While their theme is strikingly similar, the Iraqi poet has a fundamentally different attitude towards the rituals of vegetation:

في عالم الغد الفتى، واهب الحياة!
 مطر...
 مطر...
 مطر...
 سيُعشَبُ العراق بالمطر ...

In the young world of tomorrow, giver of life!
 Rain...
 Rain...
 Rain...
 Iraq will bloom with the rain...

(*Hymn of Rain*, lines 91-5)

To As-Sayâb, water, the giver of life, is a symbol of fertility, triumph and rejoicing. It symbolises hope for resurrection and rebirth, and by so doing As-Sayâb is weaving these elements of the water-as-life-giving vision in an organic union. He foresees an imminent revolution: rain in the poet's very-near future will wash Iraq, and the wind will sweep away injustice, hunger and tyranny.

Another striking difference between the two poems is again obvious, but this time in the general tone. In *The Waste Land*, Eliot tries to epitomize sterility versus fertility and raises a question in the prelude:

That corpse you planted last year in the garden,
Has it begun to sprout? Will it bloom this year? (lines 71-72)

which is frustratingly answered in *What the Thunder Said*:

Here is no water but only rock
Rock and no water and the sandy road
The road winding above among the mountains
Which are mountains of rock without water
If there were water, we should stop and drink
Amongst the rock one cannot stop or think
There is not even silence in the mountains
But dry sterile thunder without rain. (lines 331-42)

But As-Sayâb is different. He is sure that his hope for resurrection is achievable, so he alters Eliot's "dry sterile thunder," which is "without rain," to a "singing" thunder that gives rain. After "the heavens have clouded up" and as his country is "storing the thunder away," he can be almost certain that rain is going to rejuvenate the land:

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سُعِشِبَ الْعِرَاقَ بِالْمَطَرِ...

Iraq will bloom with the rain...

(*Hymn of Rain*, line 95)

Although one can immediately observe that the image of water dominates in *The Waste Land* and that the image of rain, as an equivalent symbol, dominates in *Hymn of Rain*, critics should not go immediately to the conclusion that As-Sayâb, in relying upon the Tammuz myth, is imitating Eliot. Salma Khadra Jayussi, for example, strongly believes that As-Sayâb departs from the way in which Eliot tackles the connection between rain and the barren land. She detects the difference when she notes that the Iraqi poet modifies the symbol to represent "the fertility of the rain-drenched land and the aridity of the human soul" (*Trends and Movements* 725). She specifically designates the falling of rain in the fertile valley of Mesopotamia and the subsequent sprouting of grass.

As-Sayâb's sense of national belonging is another significant departure in his modernizing project. The theme of rain, as far as it represents a distinguishing characteristic in his poetry, is, therefore, seen in another perspective: the Arabic, Qur'anic and Biblical sources. Jacques Burques, for example, stresses that the themes of *Hymn of Rain*, especially those which are related to rain, bear a resemblance to themes prevalent in the poetry of pre-Islamic Arabia. This is confirmed by the writings of Muhammad Mustafa Badawi, M.A. 'Abdul-Halim, and Malik al-Muttalibi, who emphasize a local Iraqi setting in As-Sayâb's poem.

In her critique of *Hymn of Rain*, Terri DeYoung stresses that As-Sayâb's poems generally belong to a post-colonial context in which the Iraqi poet chooses to 'misread' Eliot in a way that empowers him to "construct *The Waste Land* in his imagination as a counter-discourse to be deployed in testing and weighing, if not breaking open, the

monolithic facade comprising the canonical texts of western civilization” (*Placing the Poet* 68). This is exactly what the Iraqi poet struggled to project over a substantially long period of his life as a committed writer as he suggested in his letters:

Today evil is represented—in its most hideous and dangerous form—in colonialism...
The task of literature—or rather great literature—was, and still is, the portrayal of this conflict between evil and man...when a man of letters portrays this conflict...the cause then is his cause and the battle is his battle. That is how literature has been: one of man’s weapons with which to open up a path to a better life. (Gharfi 55)

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Through such an understanding, DeYoung emphasizes As-Sayâb’s conscious endeavour to accommodate Eliot. By so doing, the Iraqi poet conducts a parallel project in which he makes a critique of Arab civilization “in much the same way as he believed Eliot had conducted a critique and demystification of the sources of Western civilization after World War I in *The Waste Land*” (*Placing the Poet* 72). Nevertheless, As-Sayâb extends Eliot’s method beyond the limits of the Western ‘reading’ to emphasize a remarkably different approach. Through such an approach he “could in a way be seen as practicing ‘supplementation’...offering an additive reading” that would tend to supplant its precursor because it was more comprehensive and inclusive than the original” (DeYoung, *Placing the Poet* 72).

Besides, DeYoung’s reading of *Hymn of Rain*, in which she emphasizes the Qur’anic source for As-Sayâb’s apocalyptic discourse, highlights As-Sayâb’s explicit allusion to a national symbol. The significance of this reading lies in the fact that DeYoung chooses to work out a system that contrasts the various readings prevalent in the typical Tammuz-myth structure. Central to this context is her interpretation of *Hymn of Rain* as As-Sayâb’s direct employment of the apocalyptic discourse to oppose the colonizers’ claim that they were restoring Iraq to its original Edenic condition.

Although DeYoung suggests that As-Sayâb’s description of the most dismal aspects of his native world has a Western framework, she nevertheless asserts that the Iraqi poet holds a view that counters that of Eliot. As-Sayâb depicts the winter rains in a way which shows that the fertility of the land is not at issue. The problem to him lies in the serpent, which is absent from the Western accounts he is reacting to:

وفي العراق ألف أفعى تشرب الرحيق
من زهرة بريها الفرات بالندى.
وأسمع الصدى
يرد في الخليج
”مطر...
مطر...
مطر...“

And in Iraq a thousand serpents drink nectar
From a flower Euphrates nurtures with dew
And I hear the echo
Ringing in the Gulf
“Rain...”

Rain...
Rain

(*Hymn of Rain*, lines 107-13)

and depicting the people of Iraq as being robbed by crows and locusts:

أكاد أسمع النخيل يشرب المطر
وأسمع القرى تئن ، والمهاجرين
يصارعون بالمجاديف وبالقلوع،
عواصف الخليج ، والرعود ، منشدين:
”مطر...
...مطر.
...مطر.
وفي العراق جوع
وينثر الغلال فيه موسم الحصاد
لشيع الغربان والجراد
وتطحن الشوان والحجر
رحىً تدور في الحقول...حولها بشر

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I can almost hear the palms drink the rain
And hear the villages moaning, and the emigrants
Fighting, with oars and sails,
The Gulf's tempests, and thunders, chanting:
"Rain...
Rain...
Rain...
And in Iraq [there is] hunger
And the season of harvest scatters the crops in it
So that ravens and locusts get their fill
And grinds the granaries and stones
A millstone running in the fields, surrounded by humans.

(*Hymn of Rain*, lines 58-69)

DeYoung rightly captures As-Sayâb's attempt to remind us of "that particularly effective form of exploitation, which draws its strength from colonial distortions of social relations, and of equating these intrusions of colonial power to this serpent figure" (*Placing the Poet* 72). Through such attempts As-Sayâb never misses the implications of Eliot's notion that spaces are colonizable (Eliot, "Function" 421; *Notes* 113) and thus understands that the coloniality of *The Waste Land* is obvious in Eliot's endeavour to colonize the mythological spaces of the Near East, motivated by a conscious pursuit of self-renewal. Eliot, as perceived by As-Sayâb, attaches great significance to assimilating foreign influences in literature and emphasizes that "the possibility of each literature renewing itself...depends on...its ability to receive influences from abroad" (Eliot, *Notes* 113).

From these readings, it has become obvious that Eliot's stylistic influence on Badr Shakir As-Sayâb is strong. However, this fact does not justify accusing As-Sayâb of slavish imitation because it is also obvious, according to the various readings of

Hymn of Rain, that As-Sayâb dealt with the themes of his poem in a way which is incompatible with that of Eliot. I can, therefore, claim that the poem was created as an antithesis of *The Waste Land* in a number of respects and that the two poems were systematically different.

120 First, As-Sayâb's theme of rain in the context of the fertility rituals, central to both poets' masterpieces, is not identical with Eliot's. Rain in the *Hymn* stands for a rejuvenating element in a context of two paradoxical pictures. The first picture is the poet's expression of the fact that rain is a life-giving source which should result in crops and flowers. The second picture is depicted through a series of images in which the poet intends to alter the pessimistic tone of the poem. The repetition of the word "rain," especially at the end of each section of the poem, has "a hypnotic effect, creating an almost magical atmosphere in which the poet is confident that his prayer for life-giving rain for the whole of his country will be answered" (Badawi, *History* 65). This repetition prepares the scene for a growing optimistic solution. Iraq, "gathering thunders and storing up lightning," will soon get pouring rain that indicates the poet's intention to refuse to perpetuate futility.

Second, though I do not rule out the influence of Eliot on As-Sayâb's initiating the artistic use of myths, particularly those of Babylonian origin, I do believe that As-Sayâb has his own distinguishing characteristics in this context. The way in which As-Sayâb handles the Tammuz myth, for example, demonstrated that:

A fundamental difference between the English and Arabic interpretations of the Adonis [Tammuz] myth, and of *The Waste Land*, exists and supports the contention that the spiritual pessimism of much twentieth century Western poetry has never quite infiltrated modern Arabic poetry. (Asfour 51)

This emphasis on the national dimension of the Tammuz myth was a product of a distinctive poetic vision that fused Eliotic form with local material. This literary product proved to have developed a local form that responded to the local setting of the mythical theme.

Third, in countering Eliot's approach to colonizing the mythology of the Near East, and to centring the Western Metropolis, as Kadhim (145) puts it, As-Sayâb attempts to restore the balance. If Eliot's masterpiece was perceived as a step in the process of staking claim to the cultural spaces of peripheral literatures and appending them to the Western core, As-Sayâb's masterpiece would be considered as a conscious endeavour to reclaim the mythological symbols of his nation. Accordingly, such perception is the heart of the matter in As-Sayâb's de-colonizing task. Bearing in mind from his schooling days that Iraq, though formally independent, was still colonized by Britain, he was preoccupied—as the many other Iraqis were—with a task by which he could contribute to restoring the balance between the literatures of the core and periphery.

Fourth, As-Sayâb attempts in many of his poems to 'Iraqize' and 'Arabize' universal symbols and cast them in a system in which the borrowed patterns were converted.

Much evidence in his poems, where many mythological symbols were converted and localized, abounds to this effect.⁶ One obvious and interesting example is his declaration at the end of his poem *A Letter from a Graveyard* (*Risalatun min Maqbarah*) that Sisyphus has thrown away his rock:

سيزيف ألقى عنه عبء الدهور
و استقبل الشمس على "الأطلس" !

Sisyphus has hurled the burden of centuries away
And turned his face to the sun on the "Atlas"! (lines 56-7)

It is obvious here that As-Sayâb converts the Greek setting of the Sisyphus myth into an Arab setting by suggesting Algeria's Atlas Mountain Range as a place where an Arab Sisyphus, i.e. Djamilia Bouhired,⁷ stands for all the Algerian nationalists who hurled a way the burden imposed on them by the French colonialists. As-Sayâb, like many other Arab poets, celebrated what they saw as Bouhired's iconic courage and heroism.

Fifth, some critics observe that As-Sayâb extensively uses mythical allusions borrowed from the two translated chapters of *The Golden Bough* and that the debt of directing him to these allusions goes to Eliot. However, it is obvious that As-Sayâb does not accord well with the way Frazer handled universal and eastern myths. One example is the mill imagery used in *Hymn of Rain*:

وفي العراق جوع
وينثر الغلال فيه موسم الحصاد
لتنشيع الغريبان والجراد
وتتطحن السنون والحجر
رحى تدور في الحقول... حولها بشر

And in Iraq [there is] hunger
And the season of harvest scatters the crops in it
So that ravens and locusts get their fill
And grinds the granaries and stones
A millstone running in the fields, surrounded by humans.

(*Hymn of Rain*, lines 65-9)

This local Iraqi setting of the mill image encourages As-Sayâb to diverge from the imagery of *The Waste Land*, which, to him, is almost entirely built upon the Mesopotamian myth; and, although it is true that As-Sayâb was fascinated with—what he considered—the poem's bitter lampoon of the Western society, it is also true for him that this lampoon also applies to a certain extent to the sick, backward Arab society. Therefore, he sees in it "how a Western poet was able to benefit from [our] own symbols, such as symbols of Tammuz and Osiris, and he thus called [our] attention to a matter to which [we] had previously paid no attention" (Gharfi 55). This perception, nonetheless, motivates As-Sayâb to attempt a local mythological strategy, endeavouring to recapture his national lost myths, especially when he envisions his

role as a committed poet in the context of the age-old struggle against the foreigners.

In the context of such a vision, *The Waste Land* for As-Sayâb was a structure in which he could transcend the centre-periphery dichotomy and redirect the symbolic emphasis of the Tammuzi myth to correlate with the national requirements as perceived in an anti-colonial attitude. His endeavour relies upon a triangular system, to draw upon Moretti's words again, by which he blends Arabic tradition and Western form to create a new form, typically local. In *Hymn of Rain*, he transposes Eliot's handling of myth and keeps its general scheme, transcending *The Waste Land's* vision and setting up an antithetical system. One striking antithetical element, for example, lies in his success in building up a structure wherein the rebirth cycle is completed. Rain that was awaited all through the sections of the poem pours down at the end.

122 Finally, it is imperative to argue, borrowing John Lehmann's words, that it would be "putting matters into a false perspective" (11) to insist too exclusively on As-Sayâb's direct indebtedness to T.S. Eliot. As-Sayâb's excelling in the choice of the precise words "as though each word was the only one to fit the context" (Jayyusi, *Trends and Movements* 670), and his "strong auditory sensibility and the way he feels the sounds in the Arabic system" (I. Samarrai 229) testify that he is, above all, deeply rooted in the Arabic tradition. His ability to "make the taf'ila and the musical phrase yield to the desired emotional impact" (Asfour 50) highlights his innovative contribution to the development of modern Arabic poetry. If his poetry and critical views show English influences, they also show that Arabic poetry—from Abu Tammam down to az-Zahawi and ar-Rusafi—nourished his poetic spirit. It is this extreme richness of the poetic soil, to borrow Lehmann's terminology again, that fostered his flowering. His poetry, which is marked by a strong attachment to his childhood surroundings, takes his village, Jaykur, and her river, Buwaib, to a legendary level.

This and his creative blending of an Eliotic form with local material to generate a new form, typically his, express the heart of the fact that As-Sayâb wrote poetry with the originality of a great poet, in his language, of the stature of Eliot in English. It was confirmed that he parodied—appropriated, incorporated, and modified—diverse elements from other poets, but the fact remains that As-Sayâb was an authentic poet, though he was full of literary echoes.

If Eliot's world were a waste because rain never came, the issue with As-Sayâb would be different because

سُيَعِشِبُ الْعِرَاقِ بِالْمَطَرِ...

Iraq will bloom with the rain...

(*Hymn of Rain*, line 95)

NOTES

1. The Lebanese literary monthly, *Al-Adāb*, played an influential role in the Arab intellectual and literary scene from 1953 to 2012. The journal was founded by Suhail Idriss, who was renowned for fusing Arab nationalism with modernity in literature. After returning from France, where he earned a PhD in literature in 1952, with a dissertation on “The Foreign Influences on Modern Arabic Fiction from 1900-1950,” he established the journal in 1953, together with Bahij Uthman and Munir Al-Baalbecki. From 1956 to 1992 he was its editor. Among the well-known major contributors to the journal were the Syrian poet Nizār Qabbānī and the Iraqi female poet Nāzīk Al-Malāika, who pioneered—with As-Sayāb—the modernizing movement in Arabic poetry.
2. The other Lebanese literary monthly that also played a significant role in modernizing Arabic poetry in the 1950s, 1960s and 1970s is *Shi’r*. It was established in Beirut in 1957 by the Lebanese poets of Syrian descent, Yusuf al-Khal and Ali Ahmad Sa’id (Adūnis), who won the America Award in 2003, the Bjørnson Prize in 2007, and the Goethe Prize in 2011. He was also a perennial contender for the Nobel Prize in Literature. Another major avant-garde poetic voice of the journal was Unsi Alhajj, who also contributed to the poetry revival movement until his death in February 2014.
3. Many critics, especially M.M. Badawi, believed Western criticism had—almost always—been reflected in Arabic literary criticism. The case of European Romanticism, with its echoes in Arabic literary movements of the twenties, thirties and forties of the twentieth century, is a good example. For more details, see Muhammad 50, Lu’lu’a 181.
4. As-Sayāb is not widely known in the West, as he has been introduced in English through only a handful of articles and a few books. Yet, his poetry is widely read and studied in schools and universities in almost every Arab country. His poetry, as DeYoung stresses, “still speaks to his fellow Iraqis as somehow summative of their experiences in this century, especially the experience of the enormous changes wrought by the coming of the Western version of modernity to their land in the last one hundred years.” His reputation “continues to resonate beyond the borders of Iraq into all parts of the Arab world” (*Placing the Poet* viii). It is significant here to state that many other critics have confirmed the pioneering role played by Sayyab. See, for example, Jabra, *An-Nar wal-Jawhar* 49; al-Khabu 14; Qabash 659; al-Yusuf 58; Hawi 2; and Jayyusi, *Anthology of Modern Arabic Poetry* 427.
5. See also the writings of Mahmud al-‘Abta and Abdul-Wahid Lu’lu’a.
6. See, for example, *Min Ru’ya Fukai* [*From the Vision of Fukai*], *Fil-Maghrib al-‘Arabi* [*In the Arab Maghrib*], *Al-Mumis al-‘Amya* [*The Blind Whore*], and many other poems.
7. Djamila Bouhired was born in 1935 in colonial Algeria. When she was still very young she joined the revolution against the French occupation of her country, and in June 1957, prior to a planned demonstration, she was arrested by the French and tortured for information about that demonstration. Her courage in prison and the subsequent death sentence issued against her by the French government unleashed overwhelming pressure from the world’s public opinion and made of her a pan-Arab symbol for resisting colonialism. Although the execution was postponed indefinitely and Bouhired was released as the war was coming to an end, she became the centre of the attention of millions of Arabs everywhere in the world.

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