AMERICAN UNIVERSITY OF BEIRUT

ARAB MODERNISM: A STUDY OF BADR SHĀKIR AL-SAYYĀB AND THE FREE VERSE MOVEMENT

by
MOHAMMAD JAWDAT FAKHREDDINE

A thesis
submitted for the partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of Master of Arts in English Literature
to the Department of English
of the Faculty of Arts and Sciences
at the American University of Beirut

Beirut, Lebanon
January 2017

AMERICAN UNIVERSITY OF BEIRUT

ARAB MODERNISM: A STUDY OF BADR SHĀKIR AL-SAYYĀB AND THE FREE VERSE MOVEMENT

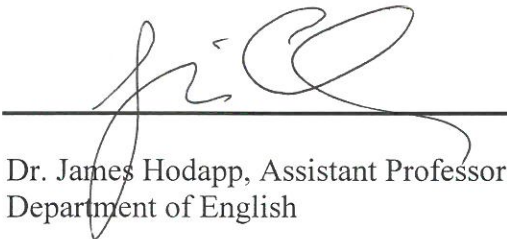by
MOHAMMAD JAWDAT FAKHREDDINE

Approved by:

_____

Dr. Sonja Mejcher-Atassi, Associate Professor   Advisor
Department of English

_____

Dr. Bilal Orfali, Associate Professor   Member of Committee
Department of Arabic and Near Eastern Languages

_____

Dr. James Hodapp, Assistant Professor   Member of Committee
Department of English

Date of thesis defense: January 23, 2017

AMERICAN UNIVERSITY OF BEIRUT

THESIS, DISSERTATION, PROJECT RELEASE FORM

Student Name:

Fakhreddine   Mohammad   Jawdat
Last   First   Middle

Ⓧ Master's Thesis   O Master's Project   O Doctoral Dissertation

☑ I authorize the American University of Beirut to: (a) reproduce hard or electronic copies of my thesis, dissertation, or project; (b) include such copies in the archives and digital repositories of the University; and (c) make freely available such copies to third parties for research or educational purposes.

☐ I authorize the American University of Beirut, to: (a) reproduce hard or electronic copies of it; (b) include such copies in the archives and digital repositories of the University; and (c) make freely available such copies to third parties for research or educational purposes

after : **One** ----   **year from the date of submission of my thesis, dissertation, or project.**
         Two ----   **years from the date of submission of my thesis, dissertation, or project.**
         Three ---- **years from the date of submission of my thesis, dissertation, or project.**

_____   February 3rd 2017
Signature   Date

AN ABSTRACT OF THE THESIS OF

Mohammad Jawdat Fakhreddine   *for*   Master of Arts
                                                                       Major: English Literature

Title: Arab Modernism: A Study of Badr Shākir al-Sayyāb and the Free Verse Movement

My thesis examines the technical and stylistic aspects of the works of Iraqi poet Badr Shākir al-Sayyāb (1926-1964), focusing on his pioneering use of meter, metaphor, and poetic structure, how he drew on precursory innovations in the use of meter and metaphor in the classical Arabic poetic tradition, and how he employed his grasp of classical prosody and rhetoric to present a new and distinct poetic voice. Most contemporary studies on twentieth century Arabic poetry focus on its thematic value (content) rather than its technical innovations (form). I argue that innovations in the form of modern Arabic poetry are a powerful means of expression and through them content is elucidated and displayed. Form is itself content. Moreover, in addition to comparing al-Sayyāb's works with that of his Arab predecessors, my study will also compare them to the poetry of his Western counterparts, particularly T.S. Eliot, in addition to evaluating his works in relation to world literature.

Unless otherwise specified, all translations in this study are mine.

For the transliteration of Arabic names and terms, I have followed the IJMES (International Journal of Middle East Studies) system.

CONTENTS

I. INTRODUCTION

In this study, I aim to examine the poetry of the Arabic free verse movement in the twentieth century through the work of Badr Shākir al-Sayyāb (1926-1964), focusing on its innovations and pioneering techniques and how these relate to world literature. World literature is a term that has garnered a great deal of debate and is far from having a rigid definition that all scholars agree on. According to David Damrosch in his book *What is World Literature* (2003)*,* world literature is defined by literary works being circulated and distributed beyond their country of origin, whether through translation or in their original language (4). Al-Sayyāb is a renowned Arab poet with many of his works having circulated and continuing to circulate in the Arab world. However, according to Terri DeYoung in *Placing the Poet: Badr Shākir al-Sayyāb and Postcolonial Iraq* (1998), he is virtually unknown in the Western world and little has been written on him except a handful of articles. Very few translations of al- Sayyāb's work exist in Western languages, with English being the primary language his poetry has been translated to, mostly by Arab scholars, such as Issa Boullata and Salma Jayyusi. I argue that twentieth century literary innovations are best reflected in the poetry of al-Sayyāb, who has exhibited an unquestionable influence on modern Arabic literature, art, and culture, and whose works are widely considered to be a turning point in the course of Arabic literary output. Al-Sayyāb's work brought forth several pioneering innovations in Arabic poetry, which can be considered a framework to mid-twentieth century Arab modernism.

It is important to note that the concept of "modernism", as well as that of "modernity", and "modernization", is quite broad and circumstantially defined.

However, it is always connected to progress and innovation. Neil Lazarus offers a thorough explanation of these terms in his article "Modernism and African Literature" (2012) using Frederic Jameson's *Postmodernism* (1991) as a reference:

> Jameson operates with a tripartite conceptualization- capitalist world system/modernity/modernism- in terms of which the latter is understood as the literature (more generally, culture) that registers and encodes the social logic of modernity. If, as he puts it, "modernization is something that happens to the base, and modernity the form the superstructure takes in reaction to that ambivalent development, then perhaps modernism characterizes the attempt to make something coherent out of their relationship" (*Postmodernism* 310). The logic of determination deployed here positions "modernity" as – to borrow the phrase that Nicholas Brown uses as the subtitle of his 2005 study, *Utopian Generations*- the "political horizon" of "modernism" (234)

Lazarus goes on to demonstrate how literary modernism is essentially reactionary to social, economic, and technological developments of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, and how "modernism" can be viewed as an artistic resistance to "modernity" (234). Edwige Tamalet Talbayev expands upon this idea in her article "Berber Poetry and the Issue of Derivation: Alternate Symbolist Trajectories" (2012). She states that resistance to Eurocentric and Western-oriented modernisms and the reclaiming of cultural, artistic, and literary legacies not integrated with the Western-based idea of "modernity" is in itself modernism:

> The reclaiming of repressed sites of modernist production requires a spatial revision of global literary models in which Europe and the United States are configured as the exclusive sites of artistic agency, and recent efforts along these lines have put on the map forms of modernist production hailing from spaces formerly considered to lie outside the purview of modernity. Yet such a project entails more than mere geographic adjustments. Inasmuch as Eurocentric linear narratives of history and modernity have underpinned the global charting of modernism, rigorous attention to alternative conceptions of time has become equally necessary. (82)

With regards to al-Sayyab, his works certainly brought forth innovation and attempted to give a strong and independent voice to the Arab people in the mid-twentieth century. He was one of the foremost and chief poets in the free verse movement and his literary

originality as well as his views on poetic progression served as an incarnation of the term "modernism" and displayed elements of what would be recognized as "post-modernism," which emerged in reaction to the single-narrative one dimensional perceptions of modernism, as is explained by Tsenay Serequeberhan in his article "The Critique of Eurocentrism" (1997), referencing Jean-Francois Lyotard's *The Postmodern Condition* (1979): "In his, by now famous book *The Postmodern Condition*, the French philosopher Jean-Francois Lyotard puts forth the thesis that the 'postmodern' is 'incredulity toward metanarratives,' the discarding of the lived and world-historical 'grand narratives' through which modernity constituted itself." (89) During the course of his literary output, al-Sayyāb aimed to bring forth and form a new and unique Arab identity through the innovations in the thoughts and images he sought to portray in his poetry.

Through al-Sayyāb's works, I showcase what I argue to be al-Sayyāb's most significant contribution to Arabic poetry, which is his ability to connect personal abstract feeling and emotion with collective concrete social conditions through his poetry's form, more significantly so than his content. Formal elements in al-Sayyāb's works reveal his attitudes, emotions, and different states of mind in an innovative and often times more effective manner than his actual subject matter and, thusly, form in his poetry is content. I will focus on how al-Sayyāb was able to reflect the political and social conditions of his home country of Iraq and the state of Arab countries as a whole through his personal experiences, as his employment of innovative poetic techniques enabled him to associate his memories and feelings with social, political, and cultural events in a free-flowing manner. These literary innovations were prevalent in the free verse movement and aimed to provide Arab writers with an unscripted means of

expression and served as a springboard for an Arab rebirth in an attempt to develop an Arab identity, culture, and society. I will also focus on English translations of al-Sayyāb's work in order to showcase how his poetry has traveled outside of the Arab world and manifests itself in the Western world as well as expand on its overall significance and influence.

Before one is to begin a study on "modern" Arabic poetry of the mid-twentieth century, it is essential to tackle the issue of what this movement is known or labeled as. The movement is most commonly referred to as the free verse movement, despite the works written by its poets following strict metrical patterns and not being "free verse" in essence. This has been an issue, as illustrated in Ahmed al-Tami's article "Arabic "Free Verse": The Problem of Terminology" (1993):

> The new movement's first critical account of itself came in al-Malāi'kah's introduction to her second *dīwān, Shaẓāyā wa Ramād* in 1949. In it she explained the prosodic bases of the movement, its goals and its artistic characteristics. She then produced a series of articles about various issues concerning the movement, and in 1954 she dubbed this new poetic form *ash-shi'r al-ḥurr*, free verse. This term seems to have won acceptance among the young poets of the fifties and sixties, the two decades distinguished by a spirit of revolt against the Arab world's political and social order, a longing for progress, and an urge to escape from tradition literary conventions. Thus the term permeated the Arab world. However, the term *ash-shi'r al-ḥurr* was not, and is still not, accepted by other poets and critics of the movement. Consequently, they have introduced other terms as substitutes. Most of them used their own terms and sometimes used more than one term in the same article. I have found eleven terms applied to the poetry of *ash-shi'r al-ḥurr,* none of them agreed upon by poets and critics, a multiplicity of terms which has only served to create ambiguity and confuse the reader. (186)

Nevertheless, due to the fact that it is customarily referred to as such by most scholars, I will refer to the movement as the free verse movement in my study.

There have been several articles written on al-Sayyāb, the free verse movement and its innovations, influences, and legacy. However, most of them focus on the thematic developments, or the content, rather than actual technical innovations

4

implemented, or the form. There is also a significant focus on Western literature's influence on Arabic literary works and not enough emphasis on the inventiveness and originality of the Arab poet. For instance, "Rewriting the Wasteland": Badr Shākir al-Sayyāb's "Fi al-Maghrib al-'Arabi" (1999) by Hussein Kadhim focuses on the use of symbolism to reflect the theme of destruction in the works of both T.S. Eliot and al-Sayyāb, showcasing the influence of *The Waste Land* on al-Sayyāb and how he would mimic Eliot's writing style in his poem *"Fi al-maghrib al-'arabi"*, (In the Arab Maghreb) translated by Kadhim himself in 1999. Despite tackling the poem's structure and style on the surface, this study is primarily concerned with comparing and contrasting its elements with that of *The Waste Land* in a mostly thematic manner, rather than focusing on the originality and broader implications of al-Sayyāb's poetry and how it was drastically different from anything else that was written in the canon of Arabic literature at the time. It did not thoroughly examine why and how al-Sayyāb implemented these innovations in order to better express himself and freely associate his inner feelings and personal experiences with political and cultural situations and phenomenon. It did, however, extensively display Eliot's influence on al-Sayyāb through a careful study of both *The Waste Land* and *"Fi al-maghrib al-'arabi"*, but neglected to go into detail on the extent and significance of this Western influence on the free verse movement and Arabic literature. The same can be said about Nazeer El-Azma's "The Tammūzī Movement and the Influence of T.S. Eliot on Badr Shākir al-Sayyāb." (1968). It is highly fixated on the similarities between Eliot and al-Sayyāb and is too general of a study, neglecting to go into detail on the motives and implications of this influence from the Arab poet's perspective, and not discussing the originality and significance of the actual innovations in poetic form of the free verse movement. Al-

5

Sayyāb and the movement's poetic developments are incredibly unique and pioneering, but often get misunderstood simply as an imitation of modern Western poetry because of the many studies and articles written on the subject. The Arabic free verse movement has given new understandings and unscripted forms of expression to Arabic poetry and art as a whole, and should be studied in a more in-depth fashion.

Issa Boullata's works on al-Sayyāb, most notably his article "Badr Shākir al-Sayyāb and the Free Verse Movement" (1970) most comprehensively provide information on al-Sayyāb's literary and poetic achievements as well as the significance of the free verse movement in the Arab world and its influence on Arab writers, which I will use in my study. It does discuss the technical changes al-Sayyāb brought forth to Arabic poetry and examines the changes in structure, meter, and metaphors implemented. However, it does not adequately place al-Sayyāb and the free verse movement in its appropriate context. I believe the Arabic free verse movement should be compared to similar literary movements in technical detail to fully understand its significance and impact. The comparative aspect of Boullata's work is limited to purely on the surface comparisons to earlier Arabic poetry as well as earlier British Romantic poetry that influenced al-Sayyāb. It thus does not accentuate the importance and significance of al-Sayyāb's innovations and only discusses its influence and implications in a one-dimensional manner.

With most articles written on al-Sayyāb focusing on his content, and most of the times limiting study of his work to a comparison with Western poetry, most notably that of Eliot, my main objective is to closely study al-Sayyāb's form. I aim to showcase how he was able to uniquely associate his personal experiences with broader political, social, and cultural issues. Moreover, as the articles discussing his actual poetic innovations do

6

not adequately focus on the influence, significance, and objective of such innovations in a broader context, I will discuss al-Sayyāb's works in the framework of world literature and their significance beyond their country of origin, as well as focus on Eliot's influence on his poetry, but not limit my study to comparisons between the two poets, concentrating on al-Sayyāb's originality and influence on Arabic literature, culture, and identity.

Remarkably, while al-Sayyāb's poetry did bring forth a radical and drastic change in the way ideas are expressed through poetry, it thematically did not stray away from what Arabic poetry has been attempting to achieve for hundreds of years. Arabs have aspired to separate themselves from Ottoman and colonial rule and create a distinct and independent identity for themselves ever since the great Islamic empires collapsed. A notable characteristic of their literary and artistic output since the beginning of the Ottoman Empire up until the end of the colonial rule, and even to our present day, has been their representation of struggle against oppression and their attempt to recognize their identity and heritage. Al-Sayyāb embodied and reflected that very drive for independence, as he had a strong sense of belonging to his culture, but did so through works of poetry that emphasized his personal experiences, memories, and feelings with a free flowing use of metaphor and meter that distinguished him from previous poets. He was able to implement a stream of consciousness type of writing that implemented new forms of poetic expression in order to associate his personal experiences with world events and sought to define the fundamental notions of a new Arab identity and what it means to be Arab in an attempt to break free from foreign rule, which was British colonialism and its aftermath in his home country of Iraq, through his individual and unique style of writing. His poetry was able to reflect his desire for revolution and

7

change amongst the Arabs to form and establish a distinct identity, much like his innovations in literature established a new "modern" form of literature.

According to Edward Said in his article "The Text, the World, The Critic" (1975), literary texts are "worldly" in the sense that they are a product of the same worldly elements, which are interactions with circumstance, place, and society. They are thus a representation of an actuality, a palpable and concrete reality that allows the text to place itself and not allow it to be open to limitless interpretations. Literary texts place limits and constraints upon their reading according to Said because they are centered on the places and spaces that have produced them and consequently are only open to few specific, relevant, and predominantly rigid interpretations. Post-colonial literature is thus characterized by a heightened focus on place and space and, as argued by Said, is anti-temporal in the sense that its interpretation should not be modified in accordance with changing conditions and circumstances. In general, post-colonialism by and large is a term that encompasses the struggle of formerly colonized nations for independence. This is further elaborated in Stephen Slemon's article "The Scramble for Post-Colonialism" (1994) where he states that the term is quite broad and incorporates several domains:

> 'Post-colonialism', as it is now used in its various fields, describes a remarkably heterogeneous set of subject positions, professional fields, and critical enterprises. It has been used as a way of ordering a critique of totalizing forms of Western historicism; as a portmanteau term for a retooled notion of 'class', as a subset of both post-modernism and post-structuralism (and conversely, as the condition from which these two structures of cultural logic and cultural critique themselves are seen to emerge); as the name for a condition of nativist longing in post-independence national groupings; as a cultural marker of non-residency for a third-world intellectual cadre; as the inevitable underside of a fractured and ambivalent discourse of colonialist power; as an oppositional form of 'reading practice'; and- and this was my first encounter with the term- as the name for a category of 'literary' activity which sprang from a new and welcome political energy going on within what used to be called "Commonwealth" literary studies. (51)

Al-Sayyāb's poetry is usually described as "post-colonial" since the poetry he wrote was published after Iraq gained independence from Britain, and the significance and implications of this is most thoroughly discussed in DeYoung's aforementioned book *Placing the Poet: Badr Shākir al-Sayyāb and Postcolonial Iraq,* which is widely recognized as the most comprehensive study of al-Sayyāb's poetry written in English. According to DeYoung, al-Sayyāb's works were written in reaction to colonialism in an attempt to figuratively destroy all that was present in Arab countries during the time; to obliterate every last remnant of the colonized Arab world in order to bring forth a rebirth and a new brighter beginning for Arab societies and cultures. DeYoung argues that this is clearly reflected in what she describes as Al-Sayyāb's apocalyptic writings, as al-Sayyāb portrays the destruction of all things, but unlike other apocalyptic writings, al-Sayyāb's works are characterized by a hope for rebirth, and thus reflect his faith that one day the Arab world overcome Western hegemony. Hence, in accordance with this particular characteristic of his works, Al-Sayyāb did focus much of his work on temporality and time, which is not in conformity with Said's arguments and most post-colonial writing. His works can be described as modernist poetry, which according to DeYoung, is heavily time-oriented, unlike post-modernist poetry which would later emerge as place-oriented. This is heavily highlighted in several of his poems, namely "Unshūdat al-maṭar" ("Rain Song") and "Madīna bilā maṭar" ("City Without Rain"). This notion is echoed in other theoretical works such as Muhsin Al-Musawi's *Arabic Poetry: Trajectories of Modernity and Tradition* (2006). Al-Musawi also believes that al-Sayyāb's poetry focuses on an "apocalyptic" element that anticipates disorder and destruction. However, unlike DeYoung, he does not believe that the same poems that are apocalyptic anticipate an eventual rebirth. He believes that different poems reflect

different attitudes towards the situation in the Arab world and claims that most Arabic poetry written in the mid-twentieth century, most notably that of the free verse movement, is centered on this "crisis." "Poems since the late 1940s have been widely submerged in crisis of one sort or another, concluding in either apocalyptic vision or a desire for rebirth" (Al-Musawi 142).

However, according to DeYoung, despite al-Sayyāb's focus on temporality and time through his apocalyptic writing and his reflection of hope that there will be a brighter future, which is often associated with what "modernist" writers at the time embraced, al-Sayyāb did embody a post-modernist, and thus a "post-colonial" attitude as well. According to DeYoung, postmodern as well as most post-colonial writers, in contrast with modernist ones, have rejected temporality as a central emphasis of their writings, focusing on place, space, and specialization. Al-Sayyāb's poetry is highly focused on place, which is highlighted in several of his poems, as Al-Sayyāb's hometown of Jaykūr, for instance, is central to many of his works, but also time-oriented and temporal. Said would argue that his focus on place served to combat colonial interpretations of his work, but his emphasis on time gives his poetry a more abstract and personal dimension not specific to place and thus can be easily transmitted from Iraq to countries abroad. According to Damrosch in the aforementioned *What is World Literature,* literary works do not lose their authenticity in cultures beyond their home base, but rather manifest themselves into these countries and societies. This balance between space and time, which al-Sayyāb was able to achieve in his poetry, allows his works to be open to many sound interpretations with their transmission, but at the same allows them to "place themselves" so that they cannot be misinterpreted outside of their specific context. Wen-chin Ouyang argues in her article "Text, Space,

10

and the Individual Poetry of Badr Shākir al-Sayyāb: Nationalism Revolution, and Subjectivity*" (2008) that colonized subjects "produce their own discourse, a counter discourse and form of resistance to the willfully hegemonic colonial discourse that willy-nilly makes its objective the assimilation of the colonized subjects." (333) Al-Sayyāb was able to create his own discourse while embracing elements from Western modernist literature in order to combat their hegemony. He was thus a modernist writer who incorporated post-modernist and post-colonial elements in his works and was able to interweave both place and present-oriented apocalyptic visions with temporal and time-oriented hope for a brighter future.

This comes to the fore in al-Sayyāb's most prominent volume of poetry *Unshūdat al-maṭar* (*Rain Song*), which was published in 1960, two years after the Iraqi revolution of 1958 when the British-backed monarchy was overthrown and the Iraqi Republic was established. Both the publication of *Unshūdat al-maṭar* and the revolution were highly significant moments in the course of modern Iraqi and Arab history, as the establishment of the Iraqi republic was unquestionably a pivotal turning point in Iraqi social and political history, while al-Sayyāb's *Unshūdat al-maṭar* was integral in the course of the Arab and Iraqi cultural and artistic legacy. Post-colonial literature is standardly described as having been directly influenced by colonialism, where the term "colonialism" is "generally assumed to denote the occupation of territory and its subsequent exploitation and settlement" (Kadhim132). Al-Sayyāb's poetry gave voice to the diverse but cohesive and united culture of Iraq that was affected by British colonial rule, but he was by no means a typical post-colonial writer. This is what is argued by Wail S. Hassan in his article "Postcolonial Theory and Modern Arabic Literature: Horizons of Application" (2002) as he believes al-Sayyāb and the free verse

writers constructed a "post-colonial narrative" in which they embraced colonial influences in order to combat them. "Modernist poets were selectively appropriating from European literary history those paradigms, forms, and styles which served their own anti-colonial ends." (Hassan 58). As a matter of fact, one cannot label al-Sayyāb and his poetry nor affiliate them with any movement. He was an innovator and a pioneer, not adhering to rigid or fanatical mindsets, but rather having a flexible and supple approach to life where he pursued what he believed was right according to each and every situation. This is reflected in his political views. Al-Sayyāb was considered a leftist, as leftist ideologies were widely prevalent and widespread in Iraq during that time, as is illustrated in Hanna Batatu's seminal study *The Old Social Classes and the Revolutionary Movements of Iraq* (1978):

> The party attracted a large following particularly in Baghdād, Baṣra, and the middle Euphrates and by April 1947 counted 6,961 members, 50 to 60 percent of whom came, according to the party's secretary, from the middle walks of life, and comprised of merchants, shopkeepers, small property owners, craftsmen, students, teachers, lawyers, and other professionals. A proportion of the rank-and-file consisted of peasants, but the bulk of the remainder were urban workmen who, however, in their greater number were only nominally National Democrats and owed real allegiance to the Iraqi Communist party or to the League of Iraqi Communists (Batatu 306)

However, Al-Sayyāb did revert back to mainstream nationalism later in his life (Jayyusi, 427), and this supports the fact that he was never a fanatical leftist and opposed rigidity in dogma while fervently campaigning for what he believed is right. As a matter of fact, his views culminated in him eventually opposing the communist party and even comparing it to colonialism, as is evident in this excerpt from his memoirs (*mudhakkirāt*) cited by Elliott Colla in his article "Badr Shākir al-Sayyāb, Cold War Poet": "What is my purpose in these writings? We are engaged in a war of beliefs with the communists, and the communist threat is as large as the threat posed by

12

colonialism" (250). His resistance to the rigidity of principles, prioritizing free expression of emotion over unbending regulations, is reflected in his poetry which brought forth unrepressed expressiveness and heightened interest in emotion in a pioneering manner that was seldom seen in Arabic poetry, while focusing on politics strictly for the love of his country, or the "space", he belongs to. As aforementioned, standard post-colonial literature according to Terri DeYoung focuses on creating space and the usage of spatial metaphors that she describes as anti-temporal. She does state that al-Sayyāb uses these spatial metaphors but with a sense of "temporality," which according to her "is the representation of the end of things with a hopeful gesture towards the future" (DeYoung 2). This is clearly portrayed in this excerpt from "Unshūdat al-maṭar" in original Arabic as well as a version translated by Lena Jayyusi and Christopher Middleton in 1987:

في كل قطرة من المطر
حمراء أو صفراء من أجنة الزهر.
وكل دمعة من الجياع والعراة
وكل قطرة تراق من دم العبيد
فهي ابتسام في انتظار مبسم جديد
أو حلمة توردت على فم الوليد
في عالم الغد الفتي، واهب الحياة!

In every drop of rain
A red or yellow color buds from the seeds of flowers.
Every tear wept by the hungry and naked people
And every spilt drop of slaves' blood
Is a smile aimed at a new dawn,
A nipple turning rosy in an infant's lips
In the young world of tomorrow, bringer of life (83-89).

The translation is quite literal, as the excerpt does not pose any major translation challenges. The excerpt sheds light on the individuality of al-Sayyāb and the innovativeness and influence of his poetry, through which he was able to portray a distinct and unique Arab identity.

In the first chapter of my study, I will discuss the influence on and of the Arabic free verse movement in relation to world literature. I will examine the influence of Western authors on al-Sayyāb. I will also discuss how the works of the free verse movement were transmitted and understood in the Western world, and how most Western literary scholars focused on the thematic shift from earlier works of Arabic poetry rather than examined the changes in the technicalities of Arabic poetry and the innovations in language, metaphor, meter, and rhyme scheme that were used to reflect a freer flow of ideas that aimed to associate personal feelings and memories with world events. I will focus on use of meter in my second chapter. Al-Sayyāb was one of the most prominent advocates of the development of meter in Arabic poetry from the traditional *al-shi'r al-'amūdī* (classical poetry)*,* where strict metrical patterns and structures were followed, into *al-shi'r al-ḥadīth* (modern poetry), where the meter is characterized by a repetition of one measuring unit known as *taf'īla.* This allowed the poet more freedom of expression. My third chapter will be centered on the significance of metaphor and figurative language in general in al-Sayyāb's poetry. The usage of far-fetched metaphors was prevalent in the free verse movement and, of course, was implemented by al-Sayyāb. This allowed him to associate personal feelings with political, social, and cultural issues. And finally, I will focus on innovations in poetic structure in my fourth chapter. Traditional Arabic poetry dictates that every poetic verse (*bayt*) should have an independent meaning on its own. Hence, the overall meaning of a poem was not as interrelated with each of its poetic phrases (*abyāt*). Al-Sayyāb's poetry did not incorporate this notion, where his *abyāt* served to add to the overall meaning of their respective poems. This allowed his works to have a more supple and free flow of ideas where he was able to associate his personal feelings and experiences with broader

subjects. My conclusion will include a brief outlook on al-Sayyāb's influence on contemporary Arabic poetry.

II. THE ARABIC FREE VERSE MOVEMENT AND WORLD LITERATURE

There have been numerous definitions and understandings of the concept of world

literature, which literary works written in countries outside of the Western world, even

if they exhibit universal or even Western notions and concepts, are categorized under.

Due to its general, broad, and fairly vague nature, works of literature that are often

completely unrelated are grouped under the same category of world literature. This has

led to the concept of world literature being criticized by various scholars. In William

Atkinson's article "The Perils of World Literature" (2006), Atkinson believes that world

literature has become a desensitizing phenomenon that would ultimately lead to literary

works classified under that category not being relatable or accessible to any reader

around the world. He does believe that over the years, world literature has developed

from being Eurocentric, where American literary institutions solely considered

European works "world literature", to generally encompassing all the literatures of the

world while integrating the multicultural factors present in modern day societies,

however he believes that the reader must be introduced to the culture belonging to the

literary work he/she is reading in order to thoroughly understand it, thus leading to

world literature becoming out of the grasp of the general reader. Moreover, the

"universal" values exhibited in these texts can only be understood on the surface in a

one-dimensional and insubstantial manner without delving deep into the setting and

culture the text belongs to:

> The valorization of difference and specificity has led to the kind of world
> literature anthologies we now have, but it has also made it both theoretically and
> practically impossible to teach the new world literature. A proper understanding
> of a cultural artifact requires an appreciation of the culture's difference from our
> own. But what individual could possibly have sufficient preparation to do justice

to so many texts from so many moments and so many places? Yet unless students are introduced to these different cultures, through their texts, the cultures will remain objects of, at best, indifference or, at worst, suspicion and contempt. (Atkinson 46)

Another critic of the concept of world literature is Emily Apter, who in *Against World Literature* (2013) claims that literature cannot be thoroughly translated and transmitted from one culture to the other, arguing that the current paradigm of "world literature" is problematic in the sense that it cannot aptly and effectively communicate the different cultural, social, and national perceptions presented in literary works to all readers around the world. Hence, a work can never truly be "universal", and that is an issue tackled by the Nigerian novelist Chinua Achebe in his article "Colonialist Criticism" (1974). Achebe actively opposes the concept of "universality" and believes that it is a Western construct which serves to reinforce Europe and America's place as the "Subject" or center of the world while obstructing non-European and non-American writers, more specifically African writers as discussed in Achebe's article, from thoroughly communicating and transmitting their works and ideas.

> In the nature of things, the work of a Western writer is automatically informed by universality. It is only others who must strain to achieve it. So-and-so's work is universal; he has truly arrived! As though universality were some distant bend in the road which you may take if you travel out far enough in the direction of Europe or American, if you put adequate distance between yourself and your home. I should like to see the word "universal" banned altogether from discussions of African literature until such a time as people cease to use it as a synonym for the narrow, self-serving, parochialism of Europe, until their horizon extends to include all the world (Achebe 75).

It can thus be established that the critics of the concepts of "world literature" necessitate that an in-depth understanding of the time and space, or the cultural and social contexts of a poem, be present in order for a reader to fully comprehend its ideas and what it aims to tackle.

With regards to the Arabic free verse movement in general and al-Sayyāb in particular, al-Sayyāb was never considered to be a poet who thematically deliberated the meanings of his poetry, despite his emphasis on an organized and well-developed intrinsic metrical, musical, and symbolic construction. And while al-Sayyāb was highly concerned with the social and political implications of his poetry, his works were characterized by a thematically uncalculated free expression and flow of emotion, ideas, and associations, which was a major and fundamental characteristic of the free verse movement. Issa Boullata, who is one of the most renowned scholars who discussed al-Sayyāb, states in his article "The Poetic Technique of Badr Shākir al-Sayyāb": "Al-Sayyāb depended upon the flow of ideas and emotions, once he was in the mood of writing. He was not the calculating poet conscious of structure but the impulsive poet dependent on talent and genius, of which fortunately he had ample store. Free verse, which has a natural tendency to help the flow of ideas, suited his way of writing admirably" (Boullata 105). Al-Sayyāb thus did not prearrange or plan the expression of the ideas and emotions he intended to present nor did he thematically pre-design his poems. Rather, he expressed himself through an unrestricted flow of ideas and emotions, which he freely associated with different political and social events. This style allowed the reader to grasp and interact with his overall mood, experiences, and intended expressions without necessarily understanding the full cultural and folkloric references evident and abundant in his poetry. His main idea and focus is to transmit his state of mind as a poet living in the Arab world through his emotional associations and free flow of ideas, which are fairly straightforward, clear, and expressed in simple language. Some understanding of the political situation and events occurring in the Arab world and Iraq, more specifically British colonialism, the establishment of the

Hashemite monarchy in 1921, and the revolution of 1958 [1], as well as the cultural and

social dimensions of his poetry, can definitely be implemented for a more

comprehensive understanding of his works. However, al-Sayyāb's themes are

interconnected with a free use of meter, metaphor and flow of emotion, which are the

basis and major strong points of his poetry, allowing his works to reveal a certain

degree expression, thoughts, and poetic impressions and ideas adequate for any reader

to interact and relate to. This is evident in the excerpt from "Unshūdat al-maṭar" (Rain

Song), translated by Jayyusi and Middleton in 1987:

<div dir="rtl">

ومقلتاك بي تطفيان مع المطر
وعبر أمواج الخليج تمسح البروق
سواحل العراق بالنجوم والمحار،
كأنها تهمّ بالشروق
فينسحب الليل عليها من دمٍ دثار.
أصيح بالخليج:
"يا خليج
يا واهب اللؤلؤ، والمحار، والردى!"
فيرجع الصدى
كأنه النشيج:
"يا خليج
يا واهب المحار والردى.."

</div>

Your two eyes take me wandering with the rain,
Lightning from across the Gulf sweep the shores of Iraq
With stars and shells,
As if a dawn were about to break from them,
But night pulls over them a coverlet of blood.
I cry out to the Gulf:
"O Gulf, Giver of pearls, shells, and death!"
And the echo replies
As if lamenting:
"O Gulf,
Giver of shells and death" (42-52)

Once examining this excerpt, one can clearly notice that the meaning and theme is not

lost in translation, barring a few changes in sentence structure. Al-Sayyāb attempted to

---

[1] See Hanna Batatu's *The Old Social Classes and the Revolutionary Movements of Iraq*
for further reading

show that Arab societies, namely Iraq and the Gulf, are not responding to their people's

needs, and that there is a decline and weakening in Arab governments and society. This

is quite clear in both the original and the translated versions, as al-Sayyāb, at the

beginning of the excerpt, begins by speaking to his loved one, before a free association

type of expression led him to tackle a political subject, demonstrating his most notable

characteristic which is the association between personal and socio-political elements in

his poetry. He then moves on to call for the Gulf, describing it as the giver of pearls,

shells, and death, referring to the fact that in the early twentieth century, pearl diving

was a major economic activity in the Arabian Gulf. Gulf history specialist Mark Hobbs

states in his article "Divers are A Pearl's Best Friend: Pearl Diving in the Gulf 1840s-

1930s": "Before oil, the inhabitants of the Gulf's Arab coast depended on diving for

natural pearls for their economic livelihoods. And, like oil, it was chiefly European and

North American demand that dictated the success or failure of each pearling season."

Al-Sayyāb was referring to the fact that people usually die diving for pearls found in

shells underwater, and with the Gulf's echo replying back to him that it is only a giver

of shells, which are now empty, and death, al-Sayyāb reflects a sense of hopelessness

present in the Arab world at the time. The theme and subject tackled by al-Sayyāb can

be easily understood by a non-Arab reader, as it simply and clearly displays the overall

artistic atmosphere and ideas that al-Sayyāb aimed to express, even without knowledge

of the significance of pearl diving in the Gulf at the time nor any particular details of the

state of events occurring at the Arab world at the time. Al-Sayyāb freely associated

ideas in no particular design or pattern, attempting with his speaking to a loved one and

ending with an expression of hopelessness reflected in his calling out to the Gulf, to

reflect a sense of bleakness and despair in the Arab world and a need for a revolution

and change. Therefore, thematically, any reader can comprehend what al-Sayyāb is aspiring to express. However, the most important attributes of his works, which is his free flow of ideas, and connecting the personal with the socio-political, revealed in his groundbreaking use of meter, metaphor, and original poetic structures cannot be thoroughly examined or analyzed without knowledge of the Arabic language and the fundamental principles of Arabic poetry. Thus, the ideas that critics of the concept of world literature such as Apter and Atkinson asserted can be applied to al-Sayyāb's poetry if one is to not only read his works but appreciate his distinctive stylistic innovations, as a knowledge of the context of these innovations, namely a basic knowledge of Arabic poetry, is necessary in analyzing his works. However, if one is to focus solely on al-Sayyāb's thematic characteristics, his work can easily be read and understood by any reader around the world.

This can also be reflected when different attitudes regarding world literature are taken into account. Damrosch, in *What is World Literature*, believes that the concept of world literature signifies and reflects the transmission of works of literature from their country of origin to other countries around the globe and how these works manifest themselves and are understood within different cultures. "I take world literature to encompass all literary works that circulate beyond their culture of origin, either in translation or in their original language" (4). Moreover, Damrosch believes that works of literature when transmitted from one culture to another can be understood and comprehended in different ways without having their original meanings and implications lost, and thus maintaining their authenticity. Thus, the transmission of these works of literature brings forth different interpretations of the same work, and much is gained rather than lost in translation. "My claim is that world literature is not an

21

infinite, ungraspable canon of works but rather a mode of circulation and of reading, a mode that is applicable to individual works as to bodies of material, available for reading established classics and new discoveries alike." (5) Damrosch elaborates on his view of world literature as a network of transmission and cultural interaction through the views of Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, who, as Damrosch implies, was the first to coin the term "world literature". According to Damrosch, Goethe aspired to find new meanings to original works through the transmission and translation of works from one country to another, and believed that meaning would be gained rather than lost through this interaction.

> Through these conversations, we gain a nuanced picture of Goethe's manifold encounters with foreign texts. He constantly recommends to Eckermann books he has been reading, in English French, Italian and Latin, and he reads translations as readily as originals, even in the case of his works. 'I do not like to read my *Faust* any more in German,' he remarks at one point, but in a new French translation he finds his masterwork 'again fresh, new, and spirited' – even though the translation is mostly in prose." (Damrosch 6-7)

Al-Sayyāb's poetry exhibits a wide array of themes that can be interpreted differently and given new meanings by readers with different cultural backgrounds. There are many al-Sayyāb verses that an Arab reader would not necessarily exert higher authority on providing thorough and comprehensive meaning and interpretation to than a non-Arab reader. A perfect example of this is the first few lines of the poem "al-Masīḥ baʿd al-ṣalib" (The Messiah After the Crucifixion), translated by Ben Bennani in 1976:

<div dir="rtl">

بعدما أنزلوني، سمعت الرياح
في نواح طويل تسف النخيل،
والخطى وهي تنأى.
إذاً فالجراح
والصليب الذي سمّروني عليه طوال الأصيل
لم تمتني. وأنصتّ: كان العويل
يعبر السهل بيني وبين المدينة
مثل حبل يشدّ السفينة
وهي تهوي إلى القاع. كان النواح

</div>

مثل خيط من النور بين الصباح
والدجى، في سماء الشتاء الحزينة.
ثم تغفو، على ما تحسّ، المدينة

After I was brought down, I heard the winds
Whip the palm trees with wild laments;
Footsteps receded into infinity. Wounds
And the cross I was nailed to all afternoon
Didn't kill me. I listened. A cry of grief
Crossed the plain between me and the city
Like a hawser pulling a ship
Destined to sink. The cry
Was a thread of light between morning
And night in sad winter sky.
Despite all this, the city fell asleep. (1-11)

In this excerpt, al-Sayyāb is incarnating the Messiah, Jesus Christ, after being crucified in order to express his enthusiastic willingness to sacrifice himself for the welfare and wellbeing of his nation. He is supposed to be a martyr that will live on forever, with his death serving to bring forth awareness and prosperity to his nation. The nation, represented as "the city" in the poem, is saddened by his sacrifice but was conscious to what he is attempting to provide for it, as its people's cries were a "thread of light between morning and night in sad winter sky" signifying hope for a better future. This excerpt serves as an introduction to the rest of the poem and shows al-Sayyāb using Jesus Christ, the main figure of Christianity, to express his ideas of sacrifice for the greater good of the nation, setting the tone for the rest of the verses discussing the sacrificing of the poet's individual self and ego for the development and advancement of Arab nations. Given that Christianity is the largest religion in the world, with Jesus being a main focus of the poem and this excerpt, different cultures that have different understandings on Christianity may give the excerpt different interpretations and added meanings, and this is evident in this translation by Ben Bennani. For example, in the original Arabic text, the final line "ثم تغفو، على ما تحسّ، المدينة", begins with "ثم" or "then" which most probably implies that the city, or the Arab nation, sleeps comfortably

knowing that there will be a brighter future. However, in Bennani's translation, the word "despite" begins the line, clearly stating that the city's people are not mindful or conscious of the poet's sacrifice and are ungracious and unconcerned. Both interpretations fit the general scheme of the poem and are entirely valid. The "Western" interpretation of the poem evident through this translation does not exhibit any less authority over an Arabic interpretation, especially that the theme tackled relates to a religion that is widespread all over the world. Thus, Damrosch's views on new manifested meanings through translations and transmissions between different cultures definitely apply to al-Sayyāb's poetry, as exemplified in this excerpt from "al-Masīḥ baʻd al-ṣalib", but only when the thematic elements of al-Sayyāb's work are taken into consideration. When it comes to the stylistic aspect of al-Sayyāb's poetry, Damrosch's views cannot be applied as al-Sayyāb's pioneering quality, individuality, and innovativeness is primarily related to his use of the Arabic language and his creative challenging of the Arabic metrical and metaphorical foundations. When it comes to stylistics, the views of world literature critics such as Apter and Atkinson are realized. Thus, proponents of the constructive nature of the concept of world literature such as Damrosch do not shed enough light on a major issue when discussing the concept of world literature, and that is the transmission of poetic, structural, and metaphorical innovation which is the main proponent and most significant characteristic of al-Sayyāb's work.

This lack of focus on form rather than content is reflected in English language articles written on al-Sayyāb and the free verse movement, as most of them focus solely on al-Sayyāb's thematic significance, which is not nearly as noteworthy and prominent as his stylistic significance, with his most important contribution being his exquisite

24

ability to link and conjunct general experiences with personal experiences. Most English language scholarly articles only scratch the surface when dealing with al-Sayyāb's stylistic significance, as they mainly discuss the influence of Eliot and Western schools of poetry on his writing, as well as linking the subject matter of his poetry and what he aims to express to "modernism", exemplified in their focus on his temporal elements, as well as post-colonial theory reflected in his response to colonialism through the political and mostly anti-colonial ideas he aspired to express. One of the most prominent writers who studied al-Sayyāb is Terri DeYoung who did so in her book which I discussed in this study's introduction *Placing the Poet: Badr Shākir al-Sayyāb and Postcolonial Iraq* published in 1988. DeYoung mainly focuses on al-Sayyāb's content; his thematic elements and subject matter, only briefly discussing his form; the stylistic and metaphorical components of his poetry. For example, in her chapter "Empty Spaces and Unveiled Placeholders", the main issue tackled by DeYoung was her view that al-Sayyāb was able to incorporate elements pertaining to modernism into his themes, making his works accessible to worldwide readers because of their heightened focus on universal temporal themes with no connection to location in and of themselves, with elements of post-colonialism, which, concurrently, caused his themes to be localized and linked to a specific location and place, which is his home country of Iraq as well as the Arab nation as a whole. Al-Sayyāb's focus on land and space goes "beyond, or against the grain of, the modernist valorization of temporality", according to DeYoung, where space is a central issue and theme due to it being "quite literally (as well as metaphorically) the location where colonizer and colonized engage in struggles for power. (DeYoung 2). DeYoung elaborates on the postcolonial elements

25

in al-Sayyāb's work through an Edward Said quote from his article "Yeats and

Decolonization" (1990) which states:

> As Edward Said has recently said, speaking from the perspective of the colonized, "…anti-imperialist resistance … literature develops quite consciously out of a desire to distance the native African, Indian, or Irish individual from the British, French, or (later) American master. Before this can be done, however, there is a pressing need for the recovery of the land that, because of the presence of the colonizing outsider, is recoverable at first only through the imagination." (DeYoung 2)

However, al-Sayyāb was able to place a notable emphasis on time in his works, as

temporal elements are strikingly manifested in his poetry, but not negating the

importance and centrality of location, as his home country of Iraq as well as the Arab

nation are always a focal point in his writings. According to DeYoung, al-Sayyāb's

themes of apocalypse evident in his poetry are what essentially make him a "modernist"

writer, with modernism characterized by a heightened focus on temporality and time

over place and location.

> What makes this linkage between a narrative recounting of a colonial journey into an unmapped space and the apocalyptic even more interesting is that the apocalyptic is an essentially "placeless" discourse – since to be everywhere, as the Judgment Day will be, is to be in no special place in particular. While apocalyptic language is saturated with markers of temporality (even though that temporality may be confused), its lack of readily recuperable place markers is equally characteristic. (DeYoung 8)

This allows al-Sayyāb to develop a body of work that is quite unique, as his temporal

expressions are presented simultaneously and in accord with location-focused ideas.

Through this disclosure, DeYoung was able to reflect al-Sayyāb's ability to establish a

harmony between a multi-dimensional honest expression of the twentieth century Arab

struggle and Western influences within his works. Thus, in this context, DeYoung

implies that "post colonial" ideas that focus on spatialized and location-based

expressions to reflect belonging to land and country and anti-colonial sentiments

essentially embody the unobstructed and unhindered "Arab" expressions of the poet, while "modernistic" elements that are time-based and have a heightened focus on temporality reflect the Western influences evident in al-Sayyāb works. Through this interpretation, DeYoung is able to showcase al-Sayyāb's uniqueness as a poet while examining his influences and cultural elements present within his work. From there, DeYoung tackles the issue of readership, and whether Western readers can relate to al-Sayyāb's poetry. Like the aforementioned critical views regarding world literature, DeYoung focuses mainly on al-Sayyāb's themes in order to indicate whether his works can be successfully transmitted to Western readers. She believes that limited, one-dimensional understandings of Iraq and the Arab world manifest in Western societies is a hindrance to a thorough understanding of al-Sayyāb's poetry. "Any such attempt to delineate these places, inventory the "facts" about them, and seek a point of entry into Sayyāb's world creates a special difficulty for Western readers because they have at hand, ready-made, another very powerful interpretive episteme of the space known as "southern Iraq", one that differs markedly from the one operative in Sayyāb's works." (DeYoung 6). And while her ideas are true regarding readers familiarizing themselves with the dynamics of the Arab world in order to thoroughly understand al-Sayyāb's poetry from a thematic perspective, I argue that DeYoung also lacks the necessary focus on his form and the stylistics and metrics of his poetry in order to fully appreciate his work and examine his most notable distinguishing characteristics as a poet.

DeYoung's *Placing the Poet: Badr Shākir al-Sayyāb and Postcolonial Iraq* is one of the most, if not the most, notable and wide-ranging study of al-Sayyāb's poetry in the English language, and while her study is extensive and rich, she does not go into detail into what makes al-Sayyāb a truly unique pioneer in modern Arabic poetry. Her

ideas regarding Western influences on al-Sayyāb are accurate, but the most significant influence that Western poetry had on al-Sayyāb is its more free use of meter, metaphors, and poetic structures, and what made al-Sayyāb's work innovative was his ability to transmit these "modernizations" of poetry into the Arabic language and Arabic poetry. Thus, DeYoung can only go so far when examining al-Sayyāb's poetry in English, as a thorough study of al-Sayyāb would be to closely examine his works in Arabic to recognize the contributions and innovations he brought forth to Arabic poetry and its fundamental basis which has been mostly rigid for over one thousand years.

Furthermore, most articles written by academics and scholars in the English language mainly focus on the thematic influence of al-Sayyāb rather than an in-depth analysis of his work and his innovations in the Arabic language and to the Arabic poem. Boullata's works, most notably "Badr Shākir al-Sayyāb and the Free Verse Movement" (1970) and "The Poetic Technique of Badr Shākir al-Sayyāb" (1971) are the closest to a thorough study on al-Sayyāb, but do not go into detail in examining the original texts of al-Sayyāb in order to comprehensively demonstrate how he was able to distinguish himself as a poet and how he utilized his influences. There is also an interesting piece by Wen-chin Ouyang I mentioned in my introduction, "Text, Space, and the Individual in the Poetry of Badr Shākir al-Sayyāb: Nationalism, Revolution and Subjectivity", which exemplifies the English language articles written on his works. Ouyang's main objective was to examine al-Sayyāb's subject matter and the content of his poetry through a post-colonial framework by discussing themes of revolution, nationalism, anti-colonialism, and modernity. It is much too broad a study and, like the works of Boullata and DeYoung, does not provide an in-depth study of the poetic form and technical innovations al-Sayyāb was able to bring forth to Arabic poetry, and this can

only be done through a thorough and comprehensive study of his original Arabic poems.

For example, when discussing Eliot's influence on al-Sayyāb's poetry, English language articles usually discuss the thematic similarities and influence between the two poems, focusing on the implementation of myths and folklore as well as apocalyptic and temporal elements. However, very few studies focus on the technical influence Eliot has had on al-Sayyāb's poetry, despite it being written in English and al-Sayyāb's work being written in Arabic. For instance, *The Wasteland* by Eliot is notably characterized by a play on meter, allowing a more free flow of ideas similar to what al-Sayyāb aspired to implement in his poetry. It displays an irregularity in meter and uses of blank verse in different parts of the poem. This has definitely had an influence on al-Sayyāb, as we know he thoroughly read and admired the works of Eliot, as mentioned in Boullata's article "The Poetic Technique of Badr Shākir al-Sayyāb". Al-Sayyāb introduced new metrical patterns characterized by the repetition of one measuring unit known as *tafʿīla*, not implementing the traditional Arabic of *buḥūr*, where a poem should follow the rules of a specific poetic meter, or *baḥr* consisting of a certain arrangement of measuring units, or *tafāʿīl*, allowing a freer flow of ideas. *The Wasteland*'s influence is also evident in the structure of al-Sayyāb's poetry. In classical Arabic poetry, one poetic verse, or *bayt*, is written along one line, and each line is of similar length and contains a similar arrangement of measuring units. Moreover, most poetic verses in Arabic poetry convey a self-sufficient meaning independent of the meaning of the poem as a whole. This has been drastically changed by the free verse movement and al-Sayyāb, as a poetic verse on its own does not give any independent meaning, but the poem as a whole does. This is due to the influence of Western poetry, most notably Eliot and *The*

Wasteland, which also impacted the removal of the concept of poetic verse, or *bayt*, from modern Arabic poetry, as every line is of different length, allowing for a freer flow of ideas. These innovations are best exemplified in al-Sayyāb's poem "al-Nahr wa l-mawt" (Death and the River), translated by Jayyusi and Middleton in 1987:

<div dir="rtl">

بويب ...
بويب ...
أجراس برج ضاع في قرارة البحر.
الماء في الجرار, والغروب في الشجر
وتنضح الجرار أجراساً من المطر
بلورها يذوب في أنين

</div>

> Buwayb …
> Buwayb …
> 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 (1-6)

The poem shows a repetition of one measuring unit *mustaf'ilun,* with the occasional exception (*jawāz*) of *mafā'ilun* instead of *mustaf'ilun*, as the *jawāz*, or the exception in Arabic poetry, is when a metrical unit can validly be replaced with another, without a specific rigid pattern of poetic meter or *baḥr*. The lines are also clearly of different lengths and the meaning of one line is dependent on the meaning of the excerpt as a whole.

Furthermore, the influence of Eliot on the poetic form of al-Sayyāb's poetry is evident in the use of metaphor. Eliot used what is known as an extended metaphor, which displayed unreasonable and far-fetched comparisons and symbolism. This is exemplified in his poem *The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock*:

> The yellow fog that rubs its back upon the window-panes,
> The yellow smoke that rubs its muzzle on the window-panes,
> Licked its tongue into the corners of the evening,
> Lingered upon the pools that stand in drains,
> Let fall upon its back the soot that falls from chimneys,
> Slipped by the terrace, made a sudden leap,

> And seeing that it was a soft October night,
> Curled once about the house, and fell asleep (15-22)

Eliot is comparing fog and smoke to a cat, and this technique has definitely had an influence on al-Sayyāb, as what is notable about al-Sayyāb's poetry is the way he implemented metaphors that can be described as extended metaphors. His usage of very abstract and relatively far-fetched symbolism and allegory emerged in direct contrast with the traditional forms of Arabic poetry, where similes and metaphors were mostly concrete and not exaggerated beyond the realm of reason with meanings that are kept simple. "Frequently, the particular use of metaphor seems to have defined the nature of *tajdīd* (innovation) and of the individual talent of a poet; that is, the more imaginative the poet, the more sophisticated his or her metaphor." (Simawe, 276) Moreover, in general, traditional Arabic poetry did not include comparisons that are very farsighted or impractical, which al-Sayyāb implemented to a great extent. The opening lines of "Unshūdat al-maṭar" are a perfect example of this: "Your eyes are two palm tree forests in early light/Or two balconies from which the moonlight recedes" (al-Sayyāb 1-2) Traditional Arab poets would never have thought of comparing eyes to forests or balconies. In addition, phrases such as "Darkness is a black ambulance" used by al-Sayyāb in "Song in August" were seen as revolutionary and were unprecedented in Arabic poetry. This is due to the influence of Eliot and al-Sayyāb being an admirer of his poetry.

The focus on the thematic elements of al-Sayyāb's poetry leads to the magnitude and significance of his work being lost, as the continued widespread of articles emphasizing content rather than form will lead to his technical and stylistic innovations, which characterized his poetry and are the major distinctive elements within it, to be inadequately discussed. Some may argue that is the case because of the power structures

present in the world, which causes the true "voice" of al-Sayyāb and the actual implications and value of his poetry to be misrepresented and misinterpreted due to Western hegemony. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak would argue, based on the ideas that she presents in her prominent article "Can the Subaltern Speak?" (1988) that all "subordinate groups" within the power structures of the world, or the subaltern, can never truly express what they aspire to portray through their artistic works and can never truly have a "voice" as long as the power structures remain in tact, as the West, or the Subject, presents them as the Other, or the Object, through a one-dimensional portrayal of their cultures that makes it difficult for them to escape from given their status within the Western-dominated world. Thus, she believes that all works of literature written by "subordinate groups" will inevitably be misunderstood, misinterpreted, and not thoroughly examined without a fundamental change in the power structures and the subaltern cannot truly "speak". However, I argue against Spivak's points, as I believe the artistic works of the "subaltern", more specifically al-Sayyāb's poetry, can be analyzed and interpreted within Western based academic and scholarly articles and can be given back the "voice" that has been taken away from them, which are mostly due to the insufficient studies made on their works. Al-Sayyāb simply has not had enough exposure and his poetry can be tackled in its original Arabic and can be interpreted thoroughly and in a multi-dimensional manner through English language articles. A simple explanation of the fundamental basis of Arabic poetry and the use of Arabic language within Arabic poetry is all that is required for a study on al-Sayyāb, as a reader should not be fluent in the Arabic language to understand the significance of al-Sayyāb's influence on the language and the Arabic poetic structures. In her article "Problems in Current Theories of Colonial Discourse" (1987), Benita

Parry states that the "subaltern" can in fact "speak" and be heard, criticizing Spivak for neglecting what she describes as native agency.

> The story of colonialism which she reconstructs is of an interactive process where the European agent in consolidating the imperialist Sovereign Self, induces the native to collude in its own subject(ed) formation as other and voiceless. Thus while protesting at the obliteration of the native's subject position in the text of imperialism, Spivak in her project gives no speaking part to the colonized, effectively writing out the evidence of native agency recorded in India's 200 year struggle against British conquest and the Raj – discourses to which she scathingly refers as hegemonic nativist or reverse ethnocentric narrativization. (Parry 45)

Thus, the notion that al-Sayyāb is misrepresented and not adequately understood in the West is not because al-Sayyāb "cannot speak" due to the power structures, but because he has not been thoroughly and comprehensively studied.

The reason that the thematic aspects of al-Sayyāb's poetry are more emphasized than his stylistic and technical aspect is due to the fact that he is often labeled as a "nationalist" writer. However, this perception about him is wrong. For starters, I argue that nationalism itself is a political construct and using it to label a poet, or any writer or artist, is problematic since it leads to reductionism and oversimplification of the artist's work. This belief that nationalism is a but a mere construct is expressed in Benedict Anderson's article "Imagined Communities" (1983) where he states:

> Nationality, or, as one might prefer to put in view of that word's multiple significations, nation-ness, as well as nationalism, are cultural artefacts of a particular kind. To understand them properly we need to consider carefully how they have come into historical being, in what ways their meanings have changed over time, and why, today, they command such profound emotional legitimacy. I will be trying to argue that the creation of these artefacts towards the end of the eighteenth century was the spontaneous distillation of a complex 'crossing' of discrete historical forces; but that, once created, they became 'modular', capable of being transplanted, with varying degrees of self-consciousness, to a great variety of social terrains, to merge and be merged with a correspondingly wide variety of political and ideological constellations. (123-124)

Thus, I believe that nationalism is a social construct and embracing a sense of belonging to one's culture, which al-Sayyāb certainly does, does not entail that he be considered a nationalist writer. Nationalism is a very vague and arguably imagined concept, and while al-Sayyāb himself may have considered himself a nationalist, due to the ambiguity and obscurity surrounding the true definition of what nationalism is, it is incorrect to interpret al-Sayyāb's poetry and rigidly define it as nationalist, which would certainly lead to its oversimplification, as well as its distinctiveness and significance to be lost. Moreover, the issue of Arab-Iraqi nationalism was seen as vague and conflicting during al-Sayyāb's time. "What above all hastened to turn the apparent concord into fierce division was the issue of Arab unity." (Batatu 815) The poems that al-Sayyāb wrote transcend beyond what is understood as "nationalism" because of the personal and overly expressive nature of his writings, as well as his technical innovations being the most important and most influential aspects within them.

Moreover, it is essential to know the details of al-Sayyāb's life in order to better comprehend where he stood in opposition to, as well as in compliance with, the concept of nationalism. He was born in an Iraqi town, Jaykūr, to a poor family and lost his mother at a very early age, which had a huge effect on the development of his character and his personality as a poet. He first studied Arabic literature, before moving on to study English literature in Iraq, which shows that he read Eliot's poetry in their original language and was able to implement elements from them, most notably technical ones, into his Arabic works later on. During that time, he was a strong supporter of communism and its ideals, which, as aforementioned, was not uncommon for the Arab and Iraqi youth of the 1940s. As highlighted in Elliott Colla's article "Badr Shākir al-Sayyāb, Cold War Poet", he later parted ways with the Iraqi Communist Party in 1954,

but remained fervently committed to Arab nationalism. Moreover, al-Sayyāb was alive to witness the events leading up to the Palestinian *nakba* in 1948, when the state of Israel was established and many Palestinians were exiled from their home country. These events had a significant impact on most Arab and Middle Eastern countries, and having been in Iraq during the *nakba*, al-Sayyāb was considerably affected and moved by what was happening in Palestine. He was a strong advocate for the Palestinian cause and this had an unquestionable effect on his character and political views as well as his poetry. Al-Sayyāb was also quite outspoken and candid regarding his political views, and that led him to be dismissed from job titles he could have had. For instance, "following the Mosul rebellion in March 1959, al-Sayyāb was denounced as an 'enemy of the revolution' ('*adūw al-thawra*) by co-workers after he refused to sign their petition condemning Gamal Abdel Nasser. Al-Sayyāb was detained for questioning, and then fired from his job" (Colla 250)

Despite the fact that he was such an ardent campaigner for his political views, he separated them from his cultural and artistic influences. Even if he was using his poetry to promote a certain political view, he did not forbid himself from implementing Western influences into his poetry while maintaining a unique and modern Arab identity that did not neglect the many foreign influences that led to its formation, Western and colonial ones included. It was thus that he was able to establish the building blocks of a new Arab literary movement through the renewal or the free verse movement in poetry, which became very influential and instrumental in forming an Arab artistic and cultural identity. His poetry gave the movement credibility and made it a respectable form of art despite the fact it deviated away from traditional forms of Arabic poetry and incorporated Western and "colonial" elements.

Al-Sayyāb's works cannot be described as theme-related to a specific nation and culture because the understanding of what nationalism is, even in particular Arab countries such as Iraq and Lebanon, are vague. It is thus faulty to label his poetry as nationalistic, which many scholars do. Al-Sayyāb was well aware of the difficulties that one may encounter in developing a "modern" Arab national identity. Arab modernism has always been an entangled modernism since it does not solely relate to the condition of Arabs but to their relations with foreign cultures as well, as there has been a consistent taking and borrowing from both Western and Islamic societies, as is embodied by this quote by the prominent Arab poet and critic Adūnīs, who himself is considered an important figure in the free verse movement, from his *Introduction to Arab Poetics* (1985):

> I should acknowledge here that I was one of those who were captivated by Western culture. Some of us, however, went beyond that stage, armed with a changed awareness and new concepts which enabled us to reread our heritage with new eyes and realize our own cultural independence. 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 Abū Nuwās and revealed his particular poetical quality and modernity, and Mallarme's work which explained to me the mysteries of Abū Tammām's poetic language and the modern dimension in it. (1637-38)

A clear definition of an Arab national identity is thus quite difficult to affirm, and a labeling of an artist or a work of art as "nationalist" is very problematic. The question of identity has been a recurring issue amongst Arabs, as pointed out reading Batatu above. Many call for Arab unity while others claim that each and every individual Arab country has a distinct identity of its own, and this cannot be anymore evident than in our present day with the constant clashes and conflicts that occur. Therefore, al-Sayyāb aimed to create an independent literary identity that embraced all the seemingly contradicting elements of Arab society and culture through his rich body of poetry. The

concept of nationalism, especially to him, is vague and cannot be used to define his poetry in general. However, to al-Sayyāb, language and the form it takes in his poetry are a reflection of Arab identity, and his modernizing of Arabic poetic form within his works embody his attempt at modernizing Arab identity. The Arabic language has always been considered the fundamental basis of Arab identity. "The Arab has grown up in a culture which views language as his speaking image, and himself as its feeling, thinking reflection. It is a union of reason and sentiment, the chief symbol and assurance of Arab identity." (Adūnīs 1638)

All in all, the problem of how al-Sayyāb's poetry is read and understood in the West is simply due to the focus on its content, rather than its form. In the coming chapters, I will provide an in-depth analysis of al-Sayyāb's poetry, with a focus on an important feature of his poetic style, which is ability to connect personal experiences with general, political, and cultural issues.

III. METER DEVELOPMENT IN AL-SAYYĀB'S POETRY

One of the most significant and notable characteristics of al-Sayyāb's poetry, also generally regarded as the most easily recognizable and distinguishable aspect of modern Arabic poetry, is his distinctive use of meter. Poets associated with the "free verse" movement implemented meter in a way that gave their poems a sense of free flow and continuity in the outpouring of sentimental expressions, allowing it to reflect a persistence of a certain emotion and to emphasize its influence on the poet. I argue that such use of meter reflects the degree of intensity of such emotions and allows the reader to delve deeper into the poet's psychological state and grasp the influx of his/her ideas and feelings at the time of writing, and that is, of course, evident in the poetry of al-Sayyāb. In order to thoroughly comprehend the innovations that al-Sayyāb and other free verse poets brought to the fore, a basic understanding of the foundations and fundamentals of classical Arabic prosody, and certainly poetic meter, is necessary, for it is within these metrical regulations that a poet reaches a comprehensive and thorough expression of what he aims to reflect in his works, as echoed by Eliot in his article "Tradition and the Individual Talent" (1919):

> There are many people who appreciate the expression of sincere emotion in verse, and there is a smaller number of people who can appreciate technical excellence. But very few know when there is an expression of *significant* emotion, emotion which has its life in the poem and not in the history of the poet. The emotion of art is impersonal. And the poet cannot reach this impersonality without surrendering himself wholly to the work to be done. And he is not likely to know what is to be done unless he lives in what is not merely the present, but the present moment of the past, unless he is conscious, not of what is dead, but of what is already living." (Eliot 961)

Accordingly, I will define and explain the fundamental rules and regulations of Arabic meter and how they developed over time.

Two different types of sounds, recognized and established in the Arabic language, characterize the metrical rules of classical Arabic poetry. They can be described as long and short sounds. A basic metrical unit, or *taf'īla* in classical Arabic poetry is a sequence of short and long sounds. "The metric unit in Classical Arabic poetry is base consisting of two base classes which have frequently been given as long: short" (Finch 44). This sequence is arranged according to a derivation stemming from the verb *fa'ala* (فعل), or "to do". "The traditional method of scanning them [meters] is with a line of verse made up of inflected forms of the verb fa'ala 'to do' in the pattern (prosodic template) symbolizing the feet or measures which make up the line." (Finch 51). The metrical unit is named according to this derivation. For example the word *fa'ūlun* (فعولن) is the name of a metrical unit stemming from *fa'ala*, and a word like *kabīrun* (كبيرٌ), or big, is on the pattern, or is of the *wazn* (form) of *fa'ūlun*.

In essence, the basis of classical Arabic poetic meter is the assortment of particular sequences of different metrical units, or *tafā'īl*. The *baḥr*, or meter, as mentioned in chapter one, is a rigid arrangement of metrical units. There are different assortments of Arabic meters and they have been manifested and implemented in Arabic poetry ever since the *Jāhilī* era, the pre-Islamic era. The naming and classification of these meters can be traced back to the work of the prominent Arabic scholar al-Khalīl ibn Aḥmad al-Farāhīdī, who lived during the Abbasid era. "Al-Khalīl's wide-ranging intellect, power of concentration, and intuition revealed themselves in his discoveries and expositions on music, prosody, phonology, grammar and lexicology. He was the first to ascertain and analyze the metric system of pre-Islamic poetry, labeling many of the meters with the names they bear to this day (Ryding 3). One of the most notable, popular and frequently used meters in Arabic

poetry is *al-baḥr al-ṭawīl*. It is based on the sequence of the metrical units *faʿūlun*

mafāʿīlun faʿūlun mafāʿīlun. Another popular and prominent meter is *al-baḥr al-basīṭ*

and is based on the sequence *mustafʿilun fāʿilun mustafʿilun fāʿilun*. The metrical units

may be subject to certain variances, also rigidly based on rules that these poetic meters

adhere to. For example, in *al-baḥr al-ṭawīl*, the unit *mafāʿilun* can be used instead of

mafāʿīlun, and it would be in accordance with the classical metrical foundations of

Arabic prosody.

A *bayt*, or verse in classical Arabic poetry is two clearly distinct hemistiches that

are both, of course, of the form of the meter, or *baḥr* implemented in the poem. A

classical Arabic poem is a sequence of verses, or *abyāt*, with a strict application of the

baḥr employed in the poem and a rhyme scheme that dictates the second *bayt* of every

line always end with a certain rhyme that carries out for the entirety of the poem.

Moreover, a line in an Arabic poem is always and strictly a *bayt* corresponding to the

baḥr that is used. These have been the metrical regulations of Arabic prosody ever since

the *Jāhilī* era. To demonstrate the foundations of classical Arabic meter, I will use the

opening *bayt* of "Muʿallaqat Imruʾ al-Qays", which is one of the most prominent and

famous poems of the *Jāhilī* era, translated by Nancy Coffin:

قفا نبكِ من ذكرى حبيبٍ ومنزلِ
بسقطِ اللوى، بين الدخول فحوملِ
Stop, let us weep, in remembrance of a beloved and her campsite
Here in the desert between Ad-Dakhul and Hawmal (1)

The *baḥr*, or meter, implemented is *al-baḥr al-ṭawīl*. *Al-baḥr al-ṭawīl*, as

aforementioned, is based on the succession of the metrical units: *faʿūlun mafāʿīlun*

faʿūlun mafāʿīlun. Thus, the first section of the first hemistich (قفا نب) is based on the

pattern of *faʿūlun* and (كِ من ذكرى) is of the form of *mafāʿīlun*. The first hemistich as a

whole (قفا نبكِ من ذكرى حبيبٍ ومنزلِ) follows the metrical sequence of *faʿūlun mafāʿīlun*

40

faʿūlun mafāʿilun, with the final *mafāʿilun* being an acceptable variance of *mafāʿīlun*,

before beginning a new sequence in the second hemistich (بِسقطِ اللوى بين الدخول فحوملِ)

following the metrical sequence *faʿūlun mafāʿīlun faʿūlu mafāʿilun*, with *faʿūlu* being

an acceptable variance of *faʿūlun*. One metrical sequence of a *baḥr* should be

implemented in one hemistich of poetry, and since the *bayt* is composed of two

hemistiches, this sequence is repeated twice in every *bayt*. These metrical rules are the

basis of classical Arabic poetry and were strictly employed by all Arab poets of the

Jāhilī era, as the fundamentals of Arabic prosody began to emerge as rigid regulations

for poetic expression.

> Various normative values resulted from these ideas, including the belief that
> different meanings require different metres, so that the poet should choose a
> metre   appropriate to the meaning he wishes to express. This in turn led to the
> belief that there is a definite link between the nature of meanings and the
> nature of poetic rhythms. Serious or impassioned content requires long metres;
> subtle, gentle, jesting or dancing content requires short, light, metres; the names
> of the metres   are derived from their characteristics, for example: *al-ṭawīl*, 'the
> long'; *al-khafīf,* 'the light'. Rhyme, which always had to be present with metre
> in the contemporary definition of poetry, must have an agreeable ring and a
> sweet tunefulness. (Adūnīs 1632)

As Islam and the Arab Empire rose to power and expanded throughout the

Middle East and beyond, many developments took place in different fields, whether in

philosophy, science, and even prose literature, with new forms of prose rising to

prominence. Poetry, however, remained relatively the same especially when it came to

meter and adhered to the same principles that were evident in the *Jāhilī* era, as the

meters it rigidly followed were written down and thus formally established by the

scholar al-Khalīl ibn Aḥmad al-Farāhīdī in the Abbasid era. "This critical discourse,

having defined the characteristics of pre-Islamic poetry as oral poetry, then transformed

them into absolute criteria for written poetics: henceforth poetry was only to be

considered as poetry if its metres followed the rules of oral poetry, as laid down by al-

Khalīl." (Adūnīs 1633) Thus, the strict metrical components of Arabic literature were constantly and rigidly embedded into Arabic poetry even up until the Abbasid era, which is considered by many to be the golden era of Arabic poetry due to the pre-eminence and renown of poets such as al-Mutanabbī, Abū Nuwās, Abū Tammām, amongst others. I will demonstrate this through an excerpt from "Lā tabki Layla" (Don't Cry for Layla), a poem by Abū Nuwās also translated by Nancy Coffin:

<div dir="rtl">
لا تبكِ ليلى ولا تطرب إلى هندِ
واشرب على الوردِ من حمراءَ كالوردِ
كأساً إذا انحدرت في حلق شاربها
أرتكَ حمرتها في العين والخدِّ
</div>

Don't cry for Layla and don't rejoice over Hind
Instead, drink to the rose from a rosy red wine
A glass when tipped, down the drinker's throat
Leave its redness in both the eye and the cheek (1-2)

The implemented *baḥr* in this poem is *al-baḥr al-basīṭ*, which is based on the sequence of *mustafʿilun fāʿilun mustafʿilun fāʿilun*. The first two hemistiches, or first *bayt*, are based on two repetitions of the sequence of *mustafʿilun fāʿilun mustafʿilun faʿlun*, with *faʿlun* being an acceptable variance of *fāʿilun*. The second *bayt* is metrically the same, with slightly different variances, and the pattern goes on till the end of the poem. Thus, it is quite noticeable that the metrical patterns from the *Jāhilī* era up until the Abbasid era remained entirely unchanged. Moreover, very little change happened in Arabic poetry with time through the Ottoman period up until the nineteenth and early twentieth century, as the metrical fundamentals and regulations remained absolutely constant with no variation.

> From an artistic and poetical point of view the dominance of traditionalist or fundamentalist culture led to a return to the values of pre-Islamic orality. Most of the poetry written after the so-called Arab renaissance (nahḍa), by such poets as al-Barūdī (1838-1904), Shawqī (1882-1932) and their contemporaries was no more than a ritual consolidation of this return. (Adūnīs 1636-1637)

In the *nahḍa*[2], generally known as an era of prolific and significant Arabic

artistic production, there were several attempts at reform and change in Arabic poetry,

as was evident in other areas of artistic production at the time as well. However, these

changes were not associated or related to meter at all. The innovations that were brought

to the fore in *nahḍa*-era poetry were mostly thematic, with subjects that were relevant to

Arab conditions during that time period, most prominently the theme of exile from

one's home country and living abroad, prevalent amongst writers such as Eliya Abū-

Māḍī, Jubrān Khalīl Jubrān, and Amīn al-Rīḥanī, heavily influenced by the West.

> Thus the crisis of modernity appeared at its most complex during the nahḍa, a
> period which created a split in Arab life, both theoretically and practically. On
> the one hand, it was a revival of forms of expressions developed in past ages to
> respond to present problems and experiences, which was also a resuscitation of
> old ways of feeling and thinking and methods of approach. It therefore helped to
> establish these forms as absolute inviolable principles, to be eternally
> perpetuated as the single true poetry. The result was that the Arab personality, as
> expressed through this poetry, appeared to be a bundle of self-delusions, and
> Arab time to stand outside time. On the other hand, at the level of practical
> politics and daily life, the age of nahḍa was set in motion in a state of almost
> complete dependency on the West. (Adūnīs 1637)

Moreover, with the advancements and developments in the fields of media and its

widespread production and circulation in the early to mid-twentieth century emerged

the ability to circulate and transmit poetry to wider audiences, as well as technological

advancements such as the radio leading to a widespread of music that was never before

seen. As a result, there was a prominent movement amongst Arab poets during that

time, mostly in Egypt, that aimed at simplifying the language and ideas present within

Arabic works of poetry, allowing these poems to be sung and performed by notable

singers and musicians at the time as well as providing audiences from different

---

[2] The Arab Awakening, a period of political, philosophical, and artistic innovation in
the Arab world during the nineteenth and early twentieth century. For further reading,
see Albert Hourani's *Arabic Thought in the Liberal Age 1798-1939*.

educational and social backgrounds with works that they can relate to, read, and

comprehensively understand. The meter in these poems, however, was not even slightly

modified by these poets until the emergence of the free verse movement in the late

1940s.

> The work of the Egyptian Ahmad Shauqi (1869-1932), who became the major
> neoclassical poet in the Arab world, and that of several other leading poets in
> Egypt and in other Arab countries, secured for Arabic poetry the strength and
> rootedness it needed at the time. New linguistic and stylistic foundations were
> established for Arabic poetry along classical lines, characterized by vigor and
> terseness of expression, a more direct approach, and a greater balance between
> emotion, imagination, and ideas, and between the subjective and the objective.
> Poetic diction renewed itself, making good use of the old rhetoric of the classical
> *qasida,* with its loud, oratorical tone. The neoclassical poets felt in harmony
> with the fundamental assumptions of their age. (Jayyusi 3)

The works of Aḥmad Shawqī were most notably fairly simple, as is demonstrated in his

poem **"Khadaʿūha"** (They Misled Her) which was set to music and sung by Egyptian

musician Muḥammad Abdul-Wahhāb in the 1920s:

<div dir="rtl">

خدعوها بقولهم حسناء
والغواني يغرّهنّ الثناء
أتراها تناست اسمي لما
كثرت في غرامها الأسماء
إن رأتني تميل عني، كأن لم
تك بيني وبينها أشياء
نظرة، فابتسامة، فسلام
فكلام، فموعد، فلقاء

</div>

> They misled her by saying she was beautiful
> And beautiful women are flattered by praise.
> Has she forgotten my name as
> The names in her love life become many?
> If she sees me, she sways away from me as if
> There was nothing between her and I.
> A gaze then a smile then greetings
> Then words then a date then a meeting. (1-4)

The poem follows strict metrical patterns that are exactly the same as those

implemented during the *Jāhilī* and Abbasid eras, this time through employing *al-baḥr*

al-khafīf, which is based on the sequence *fāʿilātun mustafʿilun fāʿilātun,* of course

incorporating its commonly used variances. Despite the ideas being simpler than those in poems from earlier eras and a notable thematic shift evident during the early twentieth century, the metrical components of the era remained the same, signifying that very little has changed when it comes to the fundamental foundation of Arabic prosody during the early twentieth-century.

The late 1940s was the time when poetry written in metrical forms that did not apply to classical Arabic poetic prosody first emerged. It is generally accepted that both al-Sayyāb and Nāzik al-Malā'ika first introduced poetry that brought forth changes in Arabic poetic meter. There has been a debate over who actually wrote the first "modern" Arabic poem between the two poets. Al-Sayyāb claimed he wrote the first modern Arabic poem and the first to implement a "modern" Arabic meter when he published the poem "Hal kāna ḥubban" (Was It Love) in his poetry collection *Azhār Dhābila* (*Withered Flowers*) in 1947. Al-Malā'ika on the other hand claims her poem "Cholera" to be the true launching point of Arabic modernism in poetry, published in the same year.

> It was this poem, entitled "Hal Kāna Ḥubban?" (Was It Love?),which Sayyāb would later claim as his first poem in *al-shi'r al-ḥurr* (a term usually translated as "free verse"). By what is probably the most extraordinary coincidence in modern Arabic literary history, another aspiring Baghdadi poet, Nāzik Al-Malā'ka, a young woman a few years older than Sayyāb who had also graduated from the Teachers College, would write a poem in October 1947 using identical innovative change in Arabic metrics. Her poem would be published in a Beirut literary magazine early in December, a couple of weeks before Sayyāb's *Withered Flowers* appeared in Baghdad bookshops. This coincidence later led to much inconclusive arguing over who was first to write in this form, arguments that have perhaps unduly absorbed the attention of those who have written about free verse and the literary movement that grew up around it (DeYoung 191-192)

As mentioned in my previous chapter, the meter in modern Arabic poetry is centered on one *taf'īla* being constantly repeated throughout the entirety poem. Thus, and contrary to popular belief due to the movement being commonly and misleadingly known as the

"free verse movement", modern Arabic poetry is not completely void of meter and actually follows strict metrical patterns. In addition, despite the poem rigidly following the repetition of a *taf'īla* and its respective variances, there is no particular emphasis on rhyme scheme in modern Arabic poetry. The use of rhyme is absolutely free and the poet is in complete control over how he/she implements rhymes in his/her works. Moreover, the meter is not regulated by a specific line or *bayt*. In that sense, the meter flows freely, regardless of structure. The opening three lines of al-Malā'ika's "Cholera" perfectly reflect these notions:

<div dir="rtl">

سكن الليل
أصغِ إلى وقع صدى الأنات
في عمق الظلمة، تحت الصمت، على الأموات

</div>

> The night is silent
> Listen to the echoes of the cries
> In the heart of darkness, under silence, of the dead.(1-3)

The poem is based on the repetition of *fa'ilun* and its variances. Moreover, the lines are of varying lengths with the second and third lines rhyming but the first line not adhering to any particular rhyme scheme. "Hal kāna ḥubban" by al-Sayyāb, on the other hand, does have a rigid rhyme scheme. It is divided into four stanzas, each consisting of seven lines, with the first three lines rhyming with each other, the fourth line rhyming with the fifth, and the sixth rhyming with the seventh. However, this is not a traditional classical Arabic rhyme scheme which dictates that the last hemistich of every *bayt* rhyme throughout the poem. Here is the opening stanza of "Hal kāna ḥubban":

<div dir="rtl">

هل تسمين الذي ألقى هياماً؟
أم جنوناً بالأماني؟ أم غراما؟
ما يكون الحبّ؟ نوحاً وابتساما؟
أم خفوق الأضلع الحرّى، إذا حان التلاقي
بين عينينا، فأطرقت، فراراً باشتياقي
عن سماء ليس تسقيني، إذا ما
جئتها مستسقياً، إلا أواما؟

</div>

> Would you call what I feel passion?

46

Or an insanity by reason of wishing? Or romance?
What is love ? Weeping or smiling?
Or the beating of my fiery chest, if we are to meet
Eye to eye, I would look down, running away with my yearning
From a sky that doesn't satisfy my thirst, if I were
To go to it thirsty for nothing but suffering? (1-7)

In addition to its organized rhyme scheme, metrical adjustments were implemented by al-Sayyāb to reflect and portray the intensity of al-Sayyāb's feelings through a continuous stream of emotional expression that cannot be controlled, or "limited" to a prearranged and methodical structure. The central purpose of this poem is to expose to the reader al-Sayyāb's irrepressible yearning for his loved one, and thus al-Sayyāb was able to employ meter to mirror his emotions and reflect the notion that he cannot restrict what he is expressing to a traditional *bayt*. The repeated *tafʿīla* used by al-Sayyāb in this poem is *fāʿilātun*. If one is to study the poem solely focusing on the first three lines, it is quite noticeable that there is a pattern of repeating *fāʿilātun* three times in each line, in accordance with *al-baḥr al-ramal* which is based on the metrical sequence *fāʿilātun fāʿilātun fāʿilātun*. The lines can be considered hemistiches of a *bayt* and can be considered part a classical poem. However, the fourth (أم خفوق الأضلع الحرّى، إذا حان التلاقي) and fifth (بين عينينا، فأطرقت، فراراً باشتياقي) lines follow the sequence *fāʿilātun fāʿilātun fāʿilātun fāʿilātun* and *fāʿilātun fāʿilātun faʿilātun fāʿilātun* respectively, with *faʿilātun* being a variance of *fāʿilātun*. Thus, the added *tafʿīla* in each of these two lines breaks the mold traditionally dictated by classical Arabic meter, and allows a more continuous and free flowing expression to be evident within the poem.

"Hal kāna ḥubban" is not of *al-baḥr al-ramal*, but is a repetition of the *tafʿīla fāʿilāton* influenced by and based *al-baḥr al-ramal*. There is a common misconception about modern Arabic poets, as the free verse movement is generally perceived as one that has built a concept of "modern" Arabic poetry on foundations that are completely

47

antagonistic and in opposition to classical Arabic prosody and poetic fundamentals. In essence, modern Arabic poetry is highly influenced by classical poetic meters based on the repetition of the same *tafʿīla,* such as *al-baḥr al-ramal*, which I mentioned earlier, and, for instance, *al-baḥr al-rajaz*, based on the sequence *mustafʿilun mustafʿilun mustafʿilun*. These meters can be considered a springboard to modern Arabic poetry. An example of the use of such meters can be traced back to the *Jāhilī* era, as is evident in "al-Qaṣīda al-dhahabiyya" (The Golden Ode) by Labīd, translated by William R. Polk in 1974:

عفت الديار محلّها فمقامها
بمنى تأبّد غولها فرجامها

Effaced are the campsites, both the stopping points and the campgrounds:
In Minan both Ghaul and Rijam have become the haunts of wild beasts. (1)

Each *bayt* is in accordance with *al-baḥr al-kāmil*, based on the metrical sequence *mutafāʿilun mutafāʿilun mutafāʿilun*, hence the repetition of the same *tafʿīla.*

"Hal kāna ḥubban" is not one of al-Sayyāb's particularly strong poems, especially if one is to read it purely from a thematic perspective, as its subject matter is very standard and overdone, with al-Sayyāb not bringing any originality into the ideas that he expressed. However, the fiery feelings and fervent passion that al-Sayyāb felt were reflected in an inventive and effective manner through his modification of meter, as it is the chief element of the poem and allows it to flow in a unique and free fashion despite adhering to strict metrical sequences. Therefore, one cannot possibly discuss a poem as historically significant as "Hal kāna ḥubban" while only focusing on content rather than form. The pioneering use of meter is what makes the poem unique and remarkable, not only introducing an original and modern form of Arabic poetic meter, but also providing insight to al-Sayyāb's unrepressed psychological state at the time.

Another poem by al-Sayyāb notable for its unique and distinctive use of meter is "Fī al-sūq al-qadīm" (In the Ancient Market). Here are the opening lines of the poems, translated by DeYoung in 1998:

الليل، والسوق القديم
خفتت به الأصوات إلّا غمغمات العابرين
وخطى الغريب وما تبثّ الريح من نغمٍ حزين
في ذلك الليل البهيم.
الليل، والسوق القديم، وغمغمات العابرين؛
والنور تعصره المصابيح الحزانى في شحوب،
مثل الضباب على الطريق
من كلّ حانوت عتيق،
بين الوجوه الشاحبات، كأنه نغم يذوب
في ذلك السوق القديم.

Night, and the ancient market.
Where the voices have died away: all but the murmurs of the passers-by
And the footsteps of the stranger and sad songs scattered by the wind
In that inky night.
Night, the ancient market, the murmurs of the passers-by,
And the light wrung out palely from sad lamps
- like the fog on the road -
From every wine shop of ancient date,
Among the pale faces, like music dissolving
In that ancient market. (1-10)

In this excerpt, al-Sayyāb implements meter to provide extended imagery, allowing the descriptions of place, which in this case is the ancient market at night, to become connected and in a sense an extension of his psyche; his thoughts and emotions. He uses the repetition of *mutafāʿilun*, which is based on *al-baḥr al-kāmil*. This free use of meter allows al-Sayyāb to unite what he senses with what he feels, in a sense allowing both the "outer" and "inner" expressional components of his poem to be manifested as one, with an unforced sense of flow. His attachment and feeling of belonging to the marketplace he is describing is thus highlighted and emphasized. This is perfectly reflected in the use of the phrase غمغمات العابرين, or "murmurs of the passers-by", where al-Sayyāb implements it differently in two separate lines within the poem. The first

instance it is mentioned, in the second line of the poem, the murmurs are described as a voice distinct from the night and the ancient market, and thus distinct to the focal point of the poem, the night and the ancient market, which al-Sayyāb aims to connect and unite with his own personal thoughts and emotional expressions, as is evident by proclamation of the main focus of the poem in opening line الليل والسوق القديم, or "night and the ancient market". The second time "murmurs of the passers-by" is mentioned, it is in a restatement of the opening line in the fifth line, with the addition of the phrase, reflecting the notion that the murmurs have become part of the night and the ancient market and thus also part of al-Sayyāb's inner thoughts and reflections. This restatement is against classical poetic foundations, as it adds two metrical units to the opening line and disrupts the metrical balance of the poem. However, it is a profoundly strong technique implemented by al-Sayyāb to better express his intense emotional thought. Thus, discussing these metrical issues is essential when reading "Fī al-sūq al-qadīm" and one cannot analyze this poem without examining its metrical innovations and components.

Another interesting metrical technique used by al-Sayyāb is evident in an excerpt from his most famous poem, "Unshūdat al-maṭar" (Rain Song), translated by Jayyusi and Middleton in 1987.

<div dir="rtl">

ودغدغت صمت العصافير على الشجر
أنشودة المطر ...
مطر ...
مطر ...
مطر ...

</div>

The song of the rain
Rippled the silence of birds in the trees …
Drop, drop, the rain …
Drip…
Drop… the rain … (17-21)

"Unshūdat al-maṭar" is based on the repetition of *mustafʿilun*, influenced by *al-baḥr al-rajaz*, which, of course, also consists of continued repetition of *mustafʿilun* three times per hemistich. What makes this poem unique is the fact that it does not always implement a full *tafʿīla*, as the final *tafʿīla* in a line is sometimes cut short in order for the poem to flow more smoothly, as well as providing it with a sense of musicality. In this excerpt, the first line (ودغدغت صمت العصافير على الشجر) follows the sequence *mafāʿilun mustafʿilun mafāʿilun mafā*. *Mafāʿilun* is a variance of *mustafʿilun*, but *mafā* only represents an incomplete fraction of *mafāʿilun*. This will more notably be used later on in the excerpt with the repetition of the word مطر, or rain, to the pattern of *mafā*. This continuous flow of the poem represents the continuous pouring of rain, as the repetition of مطر provides the poem with a unique description of rainfall. The word *maṭar* is musically striking in the sense that it can be used to describe the sound of rainfall, as evident in the translation by Jayyusi and Middleton, which translates *maṭar* into drip and drop. Al-Sayyāb's unique use of meter gave more life to the poem, allowing his imagery to be more vivid while introducing a freer style of writing that serves to provide larger and more complex descriptions as well as help the reader delve deeper into the poet's unrestricted raw emotions.

Furthermore, al-Sayyāb sometimes, but very rarely, implements the repetition of two metrical units into his poetry rather than one, also influenced by a certain *bayt*. This can be demonstrated through a short excerpt from his poem "Yā ghurbat al-rūḥ" (O Strangeness of the Soul):

مسدودة كلّ آفاقي بأبنيةٍ
سودٍ، وكانت سمائي يلهِث البصر
في شطّها مثل طير هدّه السفر.

All my horizons are obstructed by dark buildings
My sight was out of breath on the shores of my sky
Like a bird weary from travel. (14-16)

Al-Sayyāb uses both *mustafʿilun* and *fāʿilun*, in accordance with *al-baḥr al-basīṭ*, but not adhering to the other principles of classical Arabic poetry, as there is no clear rhyme scheme throughout the poem and the form of the *bayt* is not at all utilized. Al-Sayyāb presents an extended thought that he portrays as highly significant and valuable; his inability to perceive and understand "greater" concepts and ideas as he has been obstructed by living in the city, or by "dark buildings". He uses an extended metaphor, which is a technique I examine in depth in the third chapter of my study. His stating that his "sight was out of breath" and further elaborating on this idea through simile, likening himself to a bird weary from travel, aims to emphasize his feeling of estrangement, loss, and lethargy. He shows that his emotional expression cannot be contained, or limited to a classical Arabic *bayt,* thus employing meter regardless of structure and providing his ideas with a unique sense of continuity, energy, and intensity.

Al-Sayyāb's poetry is strikingly unique and expressive, and one of the most significant factors allowing it to be so is his pioneering and inventive use of meter. The "modern" metrical systems of Arabic poetry enabled poets such as al-Sayyāb to express themselves in a more free flowing manner, allowing them to tackle themes, whether they be standard or original, in a pioneering and inventive style.

IV. AL-SAYYĀB AND METAPHOR

Metaphors in al-Sayyāb's poetry are a powerful source of unique poetic exposition that

is implemented to animate his emotions and ideas in a personal and distinct manner

while providing a free range of expression that goes beyond the traditional restrictions

of classical Arabic prosody. There have been various studies on al-Sayyāb's use of

symbolism and mythology and they are often misconstrued as the sole representation of

figurative language in his poetry, as they were far from his only allegorical and

metaphorical device.

Most academic studies on al-Sayyāb focus on Eliot's influence on his works, as

discussed in my first chapter, and al-Sayyāb has certainly drawn quite a lot of

inspiration from Eliot's remarkable use of symbolism and mythology. Al-Sayyāb

himself spoke about the significance of metaphors in his poetry in this excerpt from

Shi'r magazine in 1957, included in Boullata's "The Poetic Technique of Badr Shākir

al-Sayyāb":

> 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
> the 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 non-poetic will not be poetry. So what is
> the poet to do? He has returned to 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. (111)

In this excerpt, al-Sayyāb reflects his frustration with what society has become and that

it heavily focuses on the "worldly", as social matters of the time tend to lack what al-

Sayyāb believes to be inherently poetic or "otherworldly", thus clarifying the need for

his invocation of legends and myths in his works. This is best exemplified in his poem "Madīna bilā maṭar" (City Without Rain), where al-Sayyāb depicts a standard Iraqi city, symbolically represented by the ancient and allegorical city of Babylon that has witnessed a prolonged period of draught and scarce rainfall. He also reflects the extreme poverty, sickness, and helplessness of the city's people and the extreme need for rainfall. The poem mainly focuses on al-Sayyāb demonstrating how Tammuz, the Mesopotamian god of vegetation, and Ishtar, the Mesopotamian goddess of fertility, have forsaken the city and abandoned it, leaving it to the poor agricultural and economic conditions it is experiencing. This excerpt from the poem best showcases what al-Sayyāb is aspiring to present:

وفي غرفات عشتار
تظلّ مجامر الفخّار خاوية بلا نار،
ويرتفع الدعاء، كأن كلّ حناجر القصب
من المستنقعات تصيح:
لاهثة من التعب
تؤوب إلهة الدم، خبز بابل، شمس آذار.
ونحن نهيم كالغرباء من دار إلى دار
لنسأل عن هداياها
جياع نحن ... وأسفاه! فارغتان كفّاها،
وقاسيتان عيناها
وباردتان كالذهب.

In the chambers of Ishtar,
The ceramic braziers are empty without fire,
And prayers rise, as if all throats of the reeds
In the bogs are calling:
Gasping out of exhaustion
The goddess of blood returns, the bread of Babylon, sun of March.
And we wander like strangers from door to door
Asking for her graces.
We are hungry … O woe! Empty are her palms,
And cruel are her eyes
And cold as gold. (9-19)

However, it is apparent from this excerpt and this extended allegory as well as the symbolism it provides that it is not implemented to illustrate or emphasize a certain

54

emotion or idea in an implicit and standardly metaphorical sense, but rather

straightforwardly calls out for otherworldly interference in order to help the people of

the city suffering from the drought. This does not reflect a metaphor in the sense that

the provided imagery is employed to portray an idea that is any different or even subtly

similar to what is being written. In this sense, legends, mythology, allegory, and

symbolism are used as figurative devices but their employment cannot be considered a

use of metaphor in the customary sense of the word. This symbolism and the

implementation of mythology and legend is influenced by Eliot, but, as I will later on in

this chapter demonstrate, is not what characterizes al-Sayyāb main figurative

contributions to Arabic poetry. According to Issa Boullata, al-Sayyāb actually did not

fully understand the purpose behind Eliot's use of symbolism and mythology in *The*

Waste Land, as he viewed it as satire and that al-Sayyāb's use of legends is limited in

the sense that it lacks the multi-dimensional and socio-culturally profound aspects of

Eliot's work. This is clearly stated by Boullata in response to the al-Sayyāb excerpt I

cited earlier:

> Al-Sayyāb made this statement at the American University of Beirut in a public
> address arranged and sponsored by *Shi'r* magazine. If it may be taken as an
> explanation of his own resort to myth, some influence of T.S. Eliot can be
> surmised to underly it though perhaps he has not got Eliot's cultural depth or his
> politico-religious attitude. Al-Sayyāb believed that "modern Euruopean
> civilization has not been satirized more violently and more deeply than in the
> satire levelled against it by T.S. Eliot in his poem *The Waste Land*." al-Sayyāb's
> understanding of *The Waste Land* as a satire rather than a vision of a particular
> historical and ethical situation shows the limitations of his appreciation of T.S.
> Eliot." (Boullata 111-112)

And while his employment of legends was certainly unique and made his works more

distinguished and culturally enriched, the major methods through which al-Sayyāb

implemented metaphor in a "modern" manner are characterized by his use of extended

metaphors and far-fetched comparisons to reflect an idea that is not commonly

associated with the imagery he presents. These techniques served to reflect al-Sayyāb's vivid imagination through expressions aiming to mirror his inner psyche and deep thoughts. Along with his free use of meter, this led to him typically adopting a stream-consciousness style of writing in his poetry.

The metaphorical devices that al-Sayyāb implements in his poetry have been mostly influenced and built on innovations that were already present in the Arabic poetic tradition, most notably in the Abbasid era in the works of the *muḥdathūn* poets[3] and particularly the poet Abū Tammām. Certainly, pioneering techniques in metaphor and figurative language introduced by the predecessors to the free verse movement in the Arabic poetic tradition have not been comprehensively and adequately studied in both English language and Arabic language academia, and this is unquestionably a necessity if one is to thoroughly comprehend the significance of the free verse movement. Eliot speaks on the significance of "tradition" in his "Tradition and the Individual Talent" by stating:

> We dwell with satisfaction upon the poet's difference from his predecessors, especially his immediate predecessors; we endeavor to find something that can be isolated in order to be enjoyed. Whereas if we approach a poet without this prejudice we shall often find that not only the best, but the most individual parts of his work may be those in which the dead poets, his ancestors, assert their immortality most vigorously. And I do not mean the impressionable period of adolescence, but the period of full maturity. Yet, if the only form of tradition, of handing down, consisted in following the ways of the immediate generation before us in a blind and timid adherence to its successes, 'tradition' should positively be discouraged. We have seen many such simple currents soon lost in the sand; and novelty is better than repetition." (956)

The innovations that set the stage for the free verse movement were not immediate precursors to the free verse movement, but exhibited the same metaphoric originalities.

---

[3] *Al-Muḥdathūn*: Literally "modernizers", Abbasid group of poets known for their singularity and innovation in metaphoric expression.

These were also, of course, not commonplace in classical Arabic poetry and Abū Tammām's works were viewed as anomalies, as illustrated by the Abbasid scholar 'Alī ibn 'Abd al-'Azīz al-Jurjānī in his study "al-Wasāṭa bayna al-mutanabbī wa khuṣūmihi" (Mediation Between al-Mutanabbī and His Rivals), where he lists the basic tenets of *'amud al-shi'r*, a term used to denote the fundamental components of standard and coherent poetry. One of the fundamentals of sound poetry is "closeness in comparisons" (Al-Jurjānī 33). Abū Tammām is known for being the first prominent poet to implement far-fetched similes and metaphors considered irrational and irregular during his time. Thus, he is considered by many to be the first "modernist" poet in the Arabic tradition, and this is apparent in several of his poems, as exemplified in this *bayt*:

لا تسقني ماء الملام فإنني
صبّ قد استعذبت ماء بكائي

    Do not pour me a drink from the waters of blame for I am
    A lover and I delight in the waters of my weeping. (2)

In this excerpt, Abū Tammām is asking the person addressed not to make him "drink from the waters" of blame, reflecting the notion that Abū Tammām does not feel any remorse or regret in any of his actions, leading a self-assured and confident lifestyle. This is also reflected in the second hemistich where he states that he has felt a sense enjoyment in the waters of his weeping, or his tears. The second hemistich is not a far-fetched metaphor at all, for there is an evident familiarity, conventionality and obvious similarities between water and tears, and this phrase was, of course, common and accepted in the systems of Arabic poetry in the Abbasid era at the time, as well as earlier eras. However, the first hemistich presents a metaphor that connects abstract (blame) with concrete (waters) and that was not only irregular at the time, but considered weak and un-poetic. "Abū Tammām was intensely artificial, unnatural, his poetry does not resemble that of the forefathers and he strayed away from their ways

through his distant metaphors and invented meanings" (Al-Āmidī 6). However, Abū

Tammām's works would be canonized and referred to with reverence and respect in

later years, and thus he can be considered as one of the forefathers of literary and poetic

modernism in the Arabic tradition, and al-Sayyāb's belonging to this rich Arab poetic

tradition, as well as his influence by literature "belonging" to other cultures, set the

stage for his unique innovations, as can be demonstrated by Eliot:

> Tradition is a matter of wider significance. It cannot be inherited, and if you want it you must obtain it by great labor. It involves, in the first place, the historical sense, which we may call nearly indispensable to anyone who would continue to be a poet beyond his twenty-fifth year; and the historical sense involves a perception, not only of the pastness of the past, but of its presence; the historical sense compels a man to write not merely with his own generation in his bones, but with a feeling that the whole of the literature of Europe from Homer and within it the whole of literature of his own country has a simultaneous existence and composes a simultaneous order. This historical sense, which is a sense of the timeless as well as of the temporal and of the timeless and of the temporal together, is what makes a writer traditional. And it is at the same time what makes a writer most acutely conscious of his place in time, of his own contemporaneity." (Eliot 956)

It can thus be noted that the free verse movement spearheaded by al-Sayyāb was

notable for not only popularizing the metaphorical innovations of the *muḥdathūn* poets

in the Abbasid era, but for developing, expanding, and appropriating their use in the

twentieth century. Metaphors and allegories conventionally described as irregular and

even irrational are very common in al-Sayyāb's poetry. This is notable in this excerpt

from his poem "Ughniya fī shahr āb" (Song in August), translated by Jayyusi and

Middleton in 1987:

<div dir="rtl">

في الكهف المعتم. والظلماء
نقالة إسعاف سوداء
وكأن الليل قطيع نساء:
كحل وعباءات سود.
الليل خباء.
الليل نهار مسدود.

</div>

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 (3-8)

Al-Sayyāb reflects the intensity of his emotions through describing darkness as a black

ambulance, which can be interpreted as him viewing the night as a savior to him from

the miseries and sufferings that he endures during his everyday life, most probably due

to his frustration with the socio-political state of affairs in the Arab world, as well as his

troubled personal life due to the early loss of his mother. This is reinforced in the

ensuing lines where he describes night as a flock of women, symbolizing the beauty of

night as well as the splendor of its mystique and ambiguity, as the women are wearing

dark and mysterious adornments: black cloaks and kohl. Night also provides al-Sayyāb

with a sense of shelter and safety, as he describes it as an enormous tent. However, he

ends with a vague statement, stating that that night is a blocked day, and that is a literal

translation from the original Arabic by Jayyusi and Middleton. This can be interpreted

in different ways, and is uncharacteristic of al-Sayyāb, as when he usually implements

far-fetched metaphors, he typically elaborates on them. Night being a blocked day can

emphasize the night's mysteriousness, a sense of limitation he feels at night, or even a

stoppage in time that provides al-Sayyāb with a sense of relief and security. This

vagueness in the meaning of certain metaphors can very well be viewed as a weakness,

reflecting an uncalculated and spontaneous expression of emotion by al-Sayyāb, and

this is explained by Boullata in his article "The Poetic Technique of Badr Shākir al-

Sayyāb" as he stated: "These changes and deletions show that al-Sayyāb is constantly

aspiring for perfection but they also show that he is too much in a hurry to publish and

therefore liable occasionally to be flippant and slipshod, especially in his earlier period

and latterly in his final period when he was sick." (105). Overall, however, the metaphors implemented by al-Sayyāb in this excerpt from "Ughniya fī shahr āb" are not direct and the reader needs to associate these choices of comparisons with the overall context as well as the poet's presumed emotional state.

These techniques were characteristic of al-Sayyāb's works but were also implemented by other poets associated with the free verse movement. Here are the opening lines from Yūsuf al-Khāl's poem "al-Bi'ir al-mahjūra" (The Deserted Well), translated by Sargon Boulus and Naomi Shihab Nye in 1987:

<div dir="rtl">

عرفت إبراهيم، جاري العزيز، من زمان.
عرفته بئرا يفيض ماؤها
وسائر البشر
تمرّ لا تشرب منها، لا ولا
ترمي بها، ترمي بها حجر.

</div>

I knew Ibrahim
my dear neighbor
from way back. I knew him
as a well overflowing with water
which people passed by
without stopping to drink
or even to drop
a stone. (1-8)

Al-Khāl describes Ibrahim as a well, symbolizing the notion that Ibrahim possessed a wealth of knowledge. Al-Khāl elaborates and extends this metaphor by describing the people's interactions with Ibrahim through an interaction with a well, not only implementing a far-fetched metaphor but employing it as a starting point for an unrepressed detailed portrayal to describe the man who is the focal point of the poem, not unlike the metaphors implemented by al-Sayyāb.

Furthermore, what makes al-Sayyāb unique is that he elaborates on his metaphors and expresses himself through a series of poetic lines that connect "natural phenomena", whether it be rivers, rain, amongst others, with human emotions, and that

is, of course, facilitated by his free use of meter and poetic structure, where he is not limited to constraining his ideas into a *bayt* with a specific number of *tafāʿīl*. In "al-Nahr wa l-mawt" (Death and the River), he uses nonstandard but appropriate metaphors and imagery in order to reflect his emotional state and present the reader with an unrepressed, candid, and immaculate portrayal of his ideas and feelings:

<div dir="rtl">

أغابة من الدموع أنت أم نهر؟
والسمك الساهر، هل ينام في السحر؟
وهذه النجوم، هل تظل في انتظار.
تطعم بالحرير آلافا من الإبر؟
وأنت يا بويب...
أود لو غرقت فيك، ألقط المحار
أشيد منه دار
يضيء فيها خضرة المياه والشجر
ما تنضح النجوم والقمر،
وأغتدي فيك مع الجزر إلى البحر!
فالموت عالم غريب يفتن الصغار،
وبابه الخفي كان فيك، يا بويب ..

</div>

Are you a river or a forest of tears?
And the insomniac fish, will they sleep at dawn?
And these stars, will they stop and wait
feeding thousands of needles with silk?
And you Buwayb …
I want to drown in you, gathering shells,
building a house with them, where the overflow
from stars and moon
soaks into the green of trees and water,
and with your ebb in the early morning go to the sea.
For death is a strange world fascinating to children,
and its door was in you, mysterious, Buwayb … (Jayyusi and Middleton 24-35)

This excerpt aims to reflect the sadness and despair that is present in the setting described by al-Sayyāb, effectively albeit atypically describing the river Buwayb as a forest of tears. The "insomniac fish" that inhabit the "forest of tears" reflects the fact that all that is around is filled with anxiety, concern, and fear, as even the fish cannot rest and not sense the despair that is around. Al-Sayyāb follows this up with an over-romanticization of death, as he wishes he would drown in the river where the

61

mysterious "door of death", glorified by al-Sayyāb as "fascinating to children", lies in

its depths. It is in death that al-Sayyāb hopes to find relief, security, and happiness, as

he hopes to build a home in the depths of Buwayb after he drowns in it. The irregularity

and even absurdity of some of these lines are notable, but they are implemented

powerfully and effectively in order to portray the plain uninhibited emotion of al-

Sayyāb through beautiful, and often not premeditated, figurative language and imagery.

Another notable example of this is from al-Sayyāb's poem "Shanāshīl ibnat al-

jalabī" (Balcony of al-Jalabī's Daughter), where al-Sayyāb combined Biblical and

Quranic references and imagery with his unique sense of personal and reflective

figurative language. The following excerpt was translated by Issa Boullata in 1971:

وتحت النخل حيث تظلّ تمطر كل ما سعفه
تراقصت الفقائع وهي تفجر   إنّه الرطب
تساقط في يد العذراء وهي تهزّ في لهفه
بجذع النخلة الفرعاء (تاج وليدك الأنوار لا الذهب،
سيصلب منه حبّ الآخرين، سيبرىء الأعمى
ويبعث من قرار القبر ميتا هدّه التعب
من السفر الطويل إلى ظلام الموت، يكسو عظمه اللحما
ويوقد قلبه الثلجي فهو بحبه يثب!)
وأبرقت السماء ...

And under the palms where every palm branch is raining,
Bubbles dance as they pop- they are dates
Fallen into the hands of the Virgin as she shakes with eagerness
The trunk of the graceful palm (your child's crown is of light not gold,
The love of others will be crucified in Him, He will heal the blind,
Resuscitate from the bottom of the grave a dead man exhausted
By long travel to darkness of death, clothe his bones with flesh,
Kindle his icy heart so that it springs with His love!)
And lightening flashes in the sky … (20-28)

The palm branch raining is an unconventional image implemented to reflect the

intensity of rainfall. Dates falling from the tree are compared to dancing bubbles as they

pop, alluding to the notion that "rain is a source of life to the earth as are the dates to

Mary in her seclusion" (Boullata 108). This description of imagery is interrupted by a

reference to Jesus and the hope and good he brings to the world, put between parentheses. This "interlude" can be viewed as weakness and an indication that al-Sayyāb's overly unrestricted expressional style of writing sometimes leads him to clarify and explain his choices in metaphor within the poem itself, reducing the poetic and artistic aspect of his works. Boullata echoes this sentiment when commenting on the excerpt:

> But al-Sayyāb digresses in parenthesis when he makes allusion to Jesus. It is true his allusion emphasizes the idea of life and the life-giving and loving qualities of Jesus, so badly needed by the world. But the allusion by its length and its unnecessary intrusion tends to unfocus the image already created and introduce an element of dilation when terseness seems more appropriate (108)

The poem, overall, recalls a time when things were more favorable and focuses on al-Sayyāb's memories of the past, most probably when he was too young to realize the complexities and adversities of living amid the constant conflicts and struggles of mid-twentieth century Iraq. The world that al-Sayyāb remembers was filled with optimism even amidst rainfall. This excerpt's main purpose is to reflect a sense of hope in the midst of an apparent storm through the invocation of Mary and Jesus Christ and the comparison of rain to dates that are both sources of life. It does so in a relatively effective manner, however it does showcase al-Sayyāb's occasional weaknesses in his use of metaphor and imagery.

The most notable and prominent use of metaphor not only by al-Sayyāb but in the entire free verse movement is present in the opening lines of al-Sayyāb's famous poem "Unshūdat al-maṭar" (Rain Song):

عيناك غابتا نخيل ساعة السحر،
أو شرفتان راح ينأى عنهما القمر.
عيناك حين تبسمان تورق الكروم
وترقص الأضواء ... كالأقمار في نهر
يرجّه المجذاف وهنا ساعة السحر

<div dir="rtl">كأنما تنبض في غوريهما، النجوم ...</div>

Your eyes are two palm tree forests in early light,
Or two balconies from which the moonlight recedes
When they smile, your eyes, the vines put forth their leaves,
And lights dance … like moons in a river
Rippled by the blade of an oar at break of day;
As if stars were throbbing in the depths of them… (Jayyusi and Middleton 1-6)

Eyes described as palm tree forests were unheard of at the time of the poem's publication but al-Sayyāb implements this metaphor to reflect the depth and beautiful vastness of the addressed woman's eyes, emphasizing their clarity and purity by specifying that they are palm tree forests in early light. The phrase "two balconies" in and of itself used to describe the woman's eyes appears to be absurd at first, but al-Sayyāb masterfully renders it appropriate as the poem carries on by specifying that they are balconies from which moonlight recedes, effectively portraying that he sees sadness and despair in the darkness of her eyes. Al-Sayyāb continues by stating that her eyes smile, emphasizing the uniqueness and beauty of her joy through an irrational but expressive and revealing metaphor. The vines putting forth their leaves and lights dancing like moons in a river are metaphors that can be conventionally implemented, but what makes them unique is how al-Sayyāb elaborates and explains them in an unforced way, contrary to how he interrupted the image in "Shanāshīl ibnat al-jalabī". He carries on by stating that the river is rippled and stars were throbbing in the depths of them, effectively providing an image of the notable sparkle in the woman's eyes and the effect of her happiness on al-Sayyāb as the whole world becomes lively to him. These opening lines contain quite a few nonstandard metaphors, but the distinctive talent of al-Sayyāb is shown within them as he is able to make his ideas and expression flow smoothly regardless of the unconventionality of the figurative language and imagery used.

To conclude, metaphors are a distinguishing feature of the poetry of the free verse movement and of course al-Sayyāb. The development of their function and purpose in Arabic poetry is most distinctively characterized by an expansion of the poet's emotions with a distinct stream of consciousness type of expressional writing that allowed more freedom in the portrayal of various ideas. Legends and myths were a significant element of al-Sayyāb's poetry, and thematically they are the major focus in many of his works. However, when discussing the metaphorical devices that al-Sayyāb implements, they are only a fraction of what al-Sayyāb and the free verse movement as a whole were able to introduce.

V. AL-SAYYĀB AND POETIC STRUCTURE

The innovations in both metaphor and meter that the free verse movement brought to the fore would not have been possible had it not been for a radical change in the structural fundamentals of the Arabic poem. Al-Sayyāb's poetry was distinct in bringing forth different poetic structural forms that aided, and sometimes obstructed, the honest portrayal of the emotions and feelings he aimed to produce. As I will later demonstrate, the poetic structure of al-Sayyāb's earlier poetry was spontaneous, uncalculated, and quite chaotic while his later works reflected a more organized and premeditated approach to structure.

It is within the poem's structure and form that a poet provides context and meaning to his works, as they allow him/her to express and reflect the desired ideas and emotions in a certain methodical manner and guide the direction the poems take. In that sense, structure and form is the basis of poetry, and it is within the organization and arrangement of the poetic work that the reader can reflect on the meanings presented. This is a notion echoed in Terry Eagleton's *How to Read Literature* (2013), where he states:

> The problem with a poem or story, however, is that it does not arrive as part of a practical context. It is true that we know from words such as 'poem', 'novel', 'epic', 'comedy' and so on what sort of thing to expect, just as the way a literary work is packaged, advertised, marketed and reviewed plays an important part in determining our response to it. Beyond these vital signals, however, the work does not come to us with much of a setting at all. Instead, it creates its own setting as it goes along. We have to figure out from what it says a background against which what it says will make some sense. In fact, we are continually constructing such interpretive frames as we read, for the most part unconsciously." (Eagleton 119)

The structure of Arabic poems, like meter, had been mostly constant and rigid ever since the *Jāhilī* era up until the mid-twentieth century before the free verse

movement rose to prominence, as mentioned in chapter 2. The fundamentals of Arabic prosody state that a poem is not divided into sections, and thus the concept of "stanza" was not present in Arabic poetry. Moreover, a *bayt* should always have an independent meaning outside of the context of the poem, and a *bayt* being dependent on another to provide complete meaning was strongly discouraged. A poem should, however, flow with a unified meaning and interconnectedness amongst its verses. "The standard definition of an Arabic line (bayt)- usually composed of two hemistiches- implies that it must be a meaningful unit by itself: not depending on what precedes it, and, more importantly, not relying on what follows it, for a clear perception of the idea being expressed to emerge. (Sanni 463). This can be demonstrated in the *Jāhilī* poem "al-Qaṣīda al-dhahabiya" (The Golden Ode) by Labīd, translated by William R. Polk in 1974:

أولم تكن تدري نوار بأنّني
وصّال عقد حبائل جذّامها
ترّاك أمكنة إذ لم أرضها
أو يعتلق بعض النفوس حمامها

Or did not Nawar [his beloved of yesteryear] know that I, yes I,
The strongest binder of the knots of affection, am good at breaking them too?
One ever-ready to quit places that do not please me
Unless fate chooses to attach a certain soul there (55-56)

Each *bayt* has an independent meaning despite one directly succeeding the other and tackling the same theme focusing on the poet's strength in personality. The first *bayt* talks of the poet's unfaltering and hard-hearted nature in romantic relationships, while the second *bayt* emphasizes his steadfastness and confidence. This is a definitive representation of the classical standard structure of the Arabic poem, which remained the same in the Abbasid era, as is shown in this excerpt by al-Mutanabbī:

إذا غامرت في شرف مروم
فلا تقنع بما دون النجوم

<div dir="rtl">

فطعم الموت في أمرٍ حقير
كطعم الموت في أمرٍ عظيم

</div>

If you venture for a desired honor
Do not settle for what is below the stars.
For the taste of death for a matter petty is like
The taste of death for a matter great. (1-2)

Each *bayt* can be considered a motivational quote on its own, as al-Mutanabbī offers his unique view on how he thinks a strong person's mentality in life should be in the first *bayt*, not settling but persevering to reach an exalted goal, while the second *bayt* may very well be considered a philosophical proverb, illustrating that death is ultimately the same no matter the circumstances and implying that one should have high aspirations and reach for them with persistence. The two verses are part of a poem that is thematically in tact and focuses on the virtues of courage and determination. This fluctuation between independence and dependence of verses on one another is what makes classical Arabic poetry unique and distinctive. These structural rules remained in tact and completely unchanged even in the late nineteenth century/early twentieth century, as is evident in the opening lines of Eliya Abū-Māḍī's "al-Ṭīn" (The Human Clay) translated by Issa Boullata and Naomi Shihab Nye in 1987:

<div dir="rtl">

نسي الطين ساعة أنه طين
حقير فصال تيها وعربد
وكسى الخز جسمه فتباهى،
وحوى المال كيسه فتمرّد

</div>

The human clay forgot for a while that it was mere despicable clay, so it
Swaggered haughtily and boisterously.
Body covered with silk, it became proud; purse full of money, it grew
arrogant. (1-2)

Both verses' meanings pertain to human nature and the absurdity that Abū-Māḍī observes in people conceitedly believing they are more important than they truly are. The first *bayt* generally states this notion, while the second *bayt* focuses on materialism in specific. Each *bayt* on its own provides an independent and coherent meaning, but the

preservation of the poem as a thematically unified and consistent work of literature is maintained.

The late 1940s marked the rise of the free verse movement, and thus a radical change in poetic structure was introduced into Arabic poetry. Al-Sayyāb's works are distinct in their expansive elaboration of a single idea over several lines, defying all the foundations of classical Arabic prosody and structure. This is best exemplified in the opening lines of his poem "Fī al-Maghrib al-'arabī" (In the Arab Maghreb), translated by Jayyusi and Middleton in 1987:

<div dir="rtl">

قرأت اسمي على صخره
هنا، في وحشة الصحراء،
على آجرة حمراء،
على قبرٍ. فكيف يحس إنسان يرى قبره؟

</div>

> I have read my name on a rock
> here, in the desolation of the desert,
> on a red tablet of fired clay,
> on a grave. How
> does a person feel when he sees his grave? (1-5)

Obviously "here in the desolation of the desert," on its own does not have a meaning independent from the context of the poem, as verses in classical Arabic poems conventionally had. Even when connected with the following line "on a red tablet of fired clay", which also obviously doesn't have a meaning on its own, the lines provide no significant or tangible idea to the reader. However, when all lines from the excerpt are read together, they display a clear meaning, illustrating how the poet has read his name on a tablet on a grave. This change in structure allows a free flow of ideas without rigidly constraining thorough thematic value and meaning into a single *bayt*, in addition to allowing the poet to use *tafā'īl* more freely and implement meter to present ideas and emotions, since meter itself isn't limited to a rigid sequence in a single *bayt*. Moreover,

this flexibility and freedom of expression allows the implementation of metaphors that can be extended and developed over several lines.

Moreover, this phenomenon can be observed in poems by other free verse poets such as Nāzik al-Malā'ika, as demonstrated in the opening lines of her poem "Ughniyat ḥubb li al-kalimāt" (Love Song for Words), translated by Matthew Sorenson and Christopher Middleton in 1987):

<div dir="rtl">

فيم نخشى الكلمات؟
وهي أحيانا أكفّ من ورود
باردات العطر مرّت عذبة فوق خدود
وهي أحيانا كؤوس من رحيق منعش
رشفتها، ذات صيف، شفة من عطش.

</div>

Why do we fear words?
They can be rose-petal hands,
Cool, fragrant hands stroking our faces,
And sometimes cups of refreshing drink
Sipped in summer by thirsty lips. (1-5)

Lines such as the third and fourth ones do not possess a meaning when read on their own. However, as the poem is read as a single unit, they elaborate on the beauty and richness of words through effective and unique imagery.

With regards to the overall arrangement of a single poem, as aforementioned al-Sayyāb at first did not deliberate or overly plan how to organize or structure his poems when he first began publishing his "free verse" poetry, and this is evident in his early work. His main focus when deviating away from conventional fundamentals of Arabic poetry was to express himself with little regard to standard regulations of prosody and structure.

> This is not to say that al-Sayyāb poems are amorphous as a rule but only that structure as such is not his strongest characteristic. In his first two collections *Azhār Dhābila* (1947) and *Asāṭīr* (1950), his poems seem to be based on the mere flow of ideas by psychological association. Yet whereas in poems of traditional prosody, as in the former collection, the rhyming regular verses or the repeated stanzas keep him within some formal bounds, in poems of free verse,

as in the latter collection, his thought keeps flowing until it exhausts its energy; for there is hardly anything to stop it except the limitations of the topic treated. In his later collections, however, he tries to give a framework to his poems. (Boullata 106).

This is evident in one of his earlier poems that did not succumb to classical Arabic prosody, "Sarāb" (Illusion) written in 1948. The poem is divided into two stanzas, but no thematic shift exists between the two, as the entire poem focuses on al-Sayyāb's hopelessness, desperation, and feelings of insignificance symbolized with different varieties of imagery and metaphor. Both stanzas present the same ideas based on al-Sayyāb's free association and emotional expression. The following is an excerpt from each of the two stanzas:

<div dir="rtl">

بقايا من القافلة
تنير لها نجمة آفلة
طريق الفناء،
وتؤنسها بالغناء
شفاه ظماء.

</div>

What remains of a caravan
For which a fading star illuminates
The road to death
Is comforted by the singing
Of thirsty lips. (1-5)

The previous excerpt was from the first stanza and the following is taken from the second stanza:

<div dir="rtl">

ظلال على صفحة باردة
تحركها قبضة ماردة
وتدفعها غنوة باكية،
إلى الهاوية.

</div>

Shadows on a cold page.
Moved by a magical grasp
And pushed by a weeping song
Into the abyss. (10-13)

The two excerpts provide examples of people being led to the unknown or to their death. The first excerpt portrays despair and hopelessness through the singing of thirsty

lips while the second excerpt portrays that same emotion also through a song that reflects misery. This showcases the fact that both stanzas portray the same idea and are based on al-Sayyāb's psychological expression through vivid imagery, and a division between them is entirely unnecessary. This demonstrates al-Sayyāb's overly expressive and unrepressed style of writing that often led to him writing poetry based purely on expressional intuition and free association with little forethought regarding the overall structure and organization of the poem.

In later poems, al-Sayyāb focused more on his works' arrangement and format, maintaining his deviation away from classical Arabic poetic conventions while forming his own personal structure depending on the context and subject of the poem he is writing. This is showcased in his poem "al-Nahr wa l-mawt" (Death and The River), also divided into two stanzas. The first stanza describes how the river, ironically and quite non-standardly, symbolizes mortality, passing, and death to al-Sayyāb. He desires to fully connect his being with the river, as that seems to provide him with a sense of contentment, for death to him is inevitable. In that sense, he wants to immerse himself in the river:

أود لو أخوض فيك، أتبع القمر
وأسمع الحصى يصل منك في القرار
صليل آلاف العصافير على الشجر.

I want to plunge into you, following the moon,
Hear the pebbles hiss in your depths,
Sibilance of a thousand birds in the trees (Jayyusi and Middleton 21-23)

Thus, the stanza overall seems to be filled with despair and hopelessness, with the poet surrendering to the greater truth that in the end all will pass. However, there is a notable shift in the second stanza, as al-Sayyāb is suddenly struck by an urge to actively live and fight for his right to live:

أحس بالدماء والدموع، كالمطر

72

<div dir="rtl">

ينضحهن العالم الحزين:

أجراس موتى في عروقي ترعش الرنين،

فيدلهم في دمي حنين

إلى رصاصة يشق ثلجها الزؤام

أعماق صدري، كالجحيم يشعل العظام.

أود لو عدوت أعضد المكافحين

أشد قبضتي ثم أصفع القدر.

أود لو غرقت في دمي إلى القرار،

لأحمل العبء مع البشر

وأبعث الحياة. إن موتي انتصار!

</div>

> I feel like rain the blood, the tears
> shed by the sad world;
> my death bells ring and shake my veins,
> and in my blood a longing darkness
> 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 (Jayyusi and Middleton 43-56)

Al-Sayyāb embraces and realizes the pain and hopelessness of life, overlooking and completely disregarding the suffering that they may bring and proclaiming that he is willing to actively engage in living his everyday life and fighting for what he believes is right. He alludes to his willingness to take part in warfare for a greater cause, most probably reflecting a desire to fight for the complete freedom and independence of Arab nations during the time. The poem, published in 1960 in the poetry collection *Unshūdat al-maṭar*, reflects a time in Arab history when Gemal Abdel-Nasser's promises for change, freedom, and absolute sovereignty were still strongly present in Arab countries, and the United Arab Republic, the unification of Egypt with Syria, was still in existence:

> To weld the Arabs into one nation and bring them under one government had
> been only a year previously a vision of idealists, a vague popular feeling, a

weapon in the arsenal of ambitious parties, or the cry of calculating merchants in search of a wider market. In February of 1958, however, the pan-Arab idea achieved, rather abruptly, a partial fulfillment: with but few preliminaries and moved more by sudden impulse than calm reflection, Syria and Egypt merged in the United Arab Republic. (Batatu 815).

And with this fact in mind, al-Sayyāb was able to perfectly connect his personal sentiments, as well as the vivid imagery and psychological associations he presents, with general socio-political affairs occurring during that time. The division of stanzas in "al-Nahr wa l-mawt" is much more effective and successful than that displayed in "Sarāb", showcasing a development in al-Sayyāb's writing style and his ability to arrange and structure his works effectively. The final message of the poem was delivered in a powerful and prevailing manner due to the fact that it was unexpected and came in complete opposition to the overall ambiance of the poem in the first stanza.

The division of the Arabic poem into different stanzas and parts and the insignificance of a certain *bayt* or line are not the only structural innovations that al-Sayyāb and the free verse movement brought to the fore. Certain elements conventionally associated with prose works in the Arabic literary tradition were implemented by al-Sayyāb within the structure of his poems to clarify a certain idea and provide his works with a sense vividness and realism. For instance, in "Madīna bilā maṭar" (City Without Rain), al-Sayyāb describes a background occurrence independent but related to the setting and events he is portraying, usually characteristic in play-writing:

مدينتنا تؤرق ليلها نار بلا لهب.
تحمّ دروبها والدور، ثم تزول حماها
ويصبغها الغروب بكل ما حملته من سحب
فتوشك أن تطير شرارة ويهب موتاها:
"صحا من نومه الطيني تحت عرائش العنب ..
صحا تموز، عاد لبابل الخضراء يرعاها."
وتوشك أن تدق طبول بابل، ثم يغشاها

74

<div dir="rtl">صفير الريح في أبراجها وأنين مرضاها.</div>

Our city is kept without sleep by fire without flame,
Ablaze are its streets and houses, and then its blaze fades away
And the sunset dyes it with all the clouds it bears.
And a spark is on the verge of flying, and its dead arise:
"Awoken from his clay slumber, under the grapevines
Awoken is Tammuz, returning to green Babylon to nurture it."
And the drums of Babylon are on the verge of beating, then they are obscured
By the whistling winds in its towers and the wails of its ill. (1-8)

Al-Sayyāb describes the bleakness and misery of a city that has been void of rain through phrases relating to fire and heat, which reflect the people's suffering as well as their constant expectation for rain and, in turn, salvation, but this expectation is never fulfilled. In the meantime, Tammuz has risen and returned to Babylon (symbolizing the city in the poem), as al-Sayyāb invokes this myth through an interlude in the middle of his description, put between quotation marks. This was unheard of in the classical Arabic tradition, but al-Sayyāb implements this new technique to place emphasis on Tammuz's emergence and significance in the poem, as well as grabs the reader's attention, inciting a close reading of the myths and legends he will describe and elaborate on in the poem.

Another example of an interlude which al-Sayyāb effectively uses to enhance and enrich his poem can be seen in his "Shanāshīl ibnat al-jalabī". He implements a traditional folk song within the poem to provide it with liveliness and dynamism:

<div dir="rtl">يا مطرا يا حلبي
عبّر بنات الجلبي
يا مطرا يا شاشا
عبّر بنات الباشا
يا مطرا من ذهب.</div>

O rain so silken
Weep, daughters of the nobleman
O rain so white
Weep, daughters of the knight
O rain of gold (DeYoung 259)

The poem essentially focuses on al-Sayyāb's memories and his fondness of a girl he views from afar on her balcony, reminiscing the pleasant days of the past, and the folk song, as mentioned in the poem's footnote in al-Sayyāb's *Dīwān*, is a song children in the village of Baṣra sing when it rains. This effectively animates the poem, making al-Sayyāb's memories more tangible and lively while providing the poem with a mental picture of the village al-Sayyāb is describing not only pertaining to its visual but auditory qualities as well. This, of course, was never implemented in poems that adhered to the traditional Arabic tradition, and was most probably influenced by Eliot, who would often use folk songs in his poems, as is evident in *The Waste Land* which includes Eliot's use of, for instance, the folk song "London Bridge is Falling Down" (426), as well as by the general direction literature was taking in the twentieth century with its stream of consciousness type of writings, both in prose and poetry, exemplified most notably by James Joyce and Sylvia Plath and based primarily on free association and unrepressed styles of writing, allowing al-Sayyāb to implement folk music as an illustration of his memory.

These elements of literary "modernity" are also reflected in al-Sayyāb's ability to effectively employ speech within his poetry to enliven the scenes he is attempting to describe. This is a technique used to portray his feelings for his beloved in "Al-liqā' al-akhīr" (The Final Meeting). Al-Sayyāb first portrays the woman who is the subject of the poem speaking to him through an interlude amid the poem, saying that she will leave and never return:

<div dir="rtl">

"لا .. لن تراني. لن أعود
هيهات. لكن الوعود
تبقى تلحّ .. فخفّ أنت، وسوف آتي في الخيال
يوما، إذا ما جئت أنت. وربما سال الضياء
فوق وجوه الضاحكات   وقد نسيت؛ وما يزال

</div>

<div dir="rtl">

بين الأرائك موضع خالٍ يحدق في غباء!

هذا الفراغ! أما تحس به يحدق في وجوم؟

هذا الفراغ .. أنا الفراغ، فخفّ أنت لكي يدوم!"

</div>

"No… You will not see me … I will not return.
Oh woe! But the promises
Are demanding. So do make haste, and I will come to you as illusion
One day, if you do not come to me. And perhaps light will shine
Above the laughing faces - and you will forget; and what is
Kept empty between the couches gazes astounded.
This emptiness? Do you not sense it gazing in silence?
This emptiness … I am emptiness, so do make haste for me to stay." (20-27)

This is a powerful technique as it illustrates the intensity of al-Sayyāb's emotions through a concrete occurrence; a conversation, despite the fact that the poet remains silent. This demonstrates rather than plainly shows the dynamic of al-Sayyāb's relationship with the woman, which is a pioneering and original method in the Arabic poetic tradition. Moreover, as al-Sayyāb carries on, he reaches a point within the poem where he states what he wants the woman to say to him. He implements the portrayal of the words he desires her to speak as a device employed to animate the intensity of his feelings:

<div dir="rtl">

يا للعذاب! أما بوسعك أن تقولي:" يعجزون

عنا. فماذا يصنعون؟

لو أنني حان اللقاء

فاقتادني نجم المساء،

في غمرة لا أستفيق

ألا وأنت تلف خصري تحت أضواء الطريق؟"

</div>

Oh misery! Can you not say: "They are powerless
To us. What can they do?
I long for – And the time of meeting had come
And the evening star had guided me,
An embrace I will not wake up from
Until you hold my waist under the street lights?" (34-39)

Therefore, the use of speech as a poetic technique served to add realism and liveliness to the poem. Overall, these interludes were unprecedented in Arabic poetry, and when

implemented effectively within the poem's structure, proved to be an originally efficient and powerful method in the portrayal of ideas and emotions.

Thus, al-Sayyāb brought forth several innovations to Arabic poetry in meter and metaphor, but the structural component was most essential as it allowed him to be free and not only describe feelings and events from afar, but present vivid and lively examples within his poetry. With a blend of innovative structure, meter, and metaphor, al-Sayyāb and his contemporaries in the free verse movement were able to bring their works to life and provide more freedom to the poet.

VI. CONCLUSION

The free verse movement played a key role in the development and advancement of Arabic poetry, as no change in the regulations of prosody and what was permissible or not had ever been as radical. Al-Sayyāb perfectly embodied the spirit of change, modernity, expansion, and progress that was not only present in the Arabic free verse literary movement, but also present throughout the world in the mid-twentieth century. After two world wars, artistic and literary movements that were based on more forthright and individually distinctive freedom of expression rose to the forefront of worldwide culture in reaction, such as surrealism, confessional poetry, stream of consciousness, realism, jazz, and rock and roll music, amongst others, and heralded a radical change in the way art was produced, critiqued, and interpreted.

Moreover, when taking into account al-Sayyāb's poetry in particular, he was extremely introspective and emotionally demonstrative. This allowed him to employ poetry to help him discover himself and his wide range of emotions and further recognize and embrace them, exploring its fundamental limits and introducing unique and pioneering changes to appropriate his feelings with his artistic production. However, he was also able to connect his personal emotions with social, cultural, and political issues prevalent in Iraq and the Arab world, whether they be Western influence and its immediate consequences on Arab societies, the economic conditions of the people, or the many political instabilities and conflicts, most specifically British colonialism in Iraq preceding the rise of the Hashemite monarchy into power and leading up to the 1958 revolution. Al-Sayyāb was able to do so in a profoundly unique way, as an essential purpose of his innovations was to allow himself to express and

freely associate his deep psychological thought with outward, more specifically political, social, and cultural events.

World literature critics have debated what it signifies and means for a work of literature to be considered "world literature", and have long argued whether literature and poetry in particular can be translated and transmitted from one culture to the other. They raise valid points from different and varying perspectives. However, most academic scholars have neglected to realize the importance of form as a powerful component and means of expression in literature in general, and poetry in specific. The surface and evident content is only but one dimension of literature, despite it being the main focus of several studies on most literary works. While examining al-Sayyāb's poetic form, the method and distinctive manner through which al-Sayyāb chose to express himself are reflected, presenting a first hand account of how he intended his ideas and feelings to be portrayed and represented in his works. Understanding al-Sayyāb's poetry necessitates understanding his contributions to the Arabic poetic and literary heritage and how he uniquely implemented the Arabic language. Language is the major element in literature in general and, of course, al-Sayyāb's works in specific. Thus, an in-depth analysis of the manner in which he implemented, changed, and revolutionized the use of the Arabic language in comparison with his predecessors and the longstanding Arabic poetic tradition is essential to thoroughly and comprehensively understanding his work. "In any case, even the most innovative literary work is made up among other things of the scraps and leavings of countless texts that have come before. The medium of literature is language, and every word we use is shop-soiled, tarnished, worn thin, and featureless by billions of previous usages." (Eagleton 179). However, it is what al-Sayyāb introduces to the method in which these often used words consisting

the Arabic language are implemented that characterize his work and allow him to express himself in a distinctive and artistic manner. Thus, one cannot simply separate the form from the content and knowledge of both technical components and the thematic context of a piece of literature are necessary to thoroughly understanding and comprehending it. In other words, form is content.

Furthermore, these pioneering formal innovations introduced by al-Sayyāb and the free verse movement have with time become standardized, as it is now considered quite conventional to implement the tenets of the free verse movement into Arabic poetry. Most poetry is now written either in completely free verse and hence void of any meter or rigid structure, or according to the principles brought forth by the free verse movement in the mid-twentieth century. Thus, the influence of al-Sayyāb and his contemporaries is undisputed and is notable in many modern Arabic poets who rose to prominence in the late twentieth century, namely Maḥmūd Darwīsh, Amal Dunqul, and Joseph Ḥarb among others.

Badr Shākir al-Sayyāb is the most notable figure of the free verse movement, and a thorough study of his works with an in depth focus on the poetic form he implements is essential for modern-day poets and critics to understand and realize the basic axioms and dimensions of Arabic poetry as well as the historical development that it underwent in order to reach the point it is in during the twenty-first century. Doing so also enables a multi-dimensional study of classical Arabic poetry that foreshadowed the modern aspects in Arabic poetry today, such as the *muḥdathūn* poets for instance, which would help guide Arabic poetry's development and provide different and numerous perspectives, methodologies, and approaches to poetry.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Abū Māḍī, Eliya. *al-Aʿamal al-Shiʿriya al-Kāmila.* 1st ed. Kuwait: Muʾassasat jāʾizat

ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz Suʾūd al-Bābṭīn li l-ibdāʿ al-shiʿrī, 2008. Print.

Abū Nuwās. "Lā tabkī Layla." *Princeton Online Arabic Poetry Project.* Princeton, n.d.

Web. 29 Oct. 2016.

Abū Tammām. *Dīwan*. 4th ed. Cairo: Dār al-Maʿārif bi Maṣir, 1976. Print.

Achebe, Chinua. "Colonialist Criticism." The Post-Colonial Studies Reader. 2nd ed.

New York: Routledge, 2006. 73-77. Print.

Adūnīs. "From An Introduction to Arab Poetics". Trans. Catherine Cobham. *The

Norton Anthology of Theory and Criticism.* 2nd ed. New York: Norton & Company,

2010. 1628-48. Print.

Al-Āmidī, Abū al-Qāsim. *al-Muwāzana bayna Abi Tammām wa al-Buḥturī.* 1st ed. al-

Qāhira: Maṭbaʿat al-Ḥijāzī, 1944. Print.

Al-Jurjānī, ʿAlī ibn ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz. *al-Wasāṭa bayna al-Mutanabbī wa khuṣūmihi.* 4th ed.

al-Qāhira: Maṭbaʿat al-Bābī al-Ḥalabī, 1966. Print.

Al-Khāl, Yūsuf. *al-Aʿamal al-Shiʿriya al-Kāmila.* 1st ed. Bayrūt: al-Taʿawuniya al-Lubnāniya li al-taʾlīf wa al-nashr, 1973. Print.

Al-Malāʾika, Nāzik. *Dīwan.* Beirut: Dār al-ʿAwda, 1971. Print.

Al-Musawi, Muḥsin Jasim. Arabic Poetry: Trajectories of Modernity and Tradition. London: Routledge, 2006. Print.

Al-Mutanabbī. *Dīwan.* 2nd ed. Beirut: Dār al-Kītāb al-ʿArabī, n.d. Print.

Al-Sayyāb, Badr Shākir. *Dīwan.* Beirut: Dār al-ʿAwda, 1971. Print.

Al-Sayyāb, Badr Shākir. "The Messiah After the Crucifixion." Trans. Ben Bennani. *AGNI Online.* Boston University, 2008. Web. 1 Nov. 2016.

Al-Tami, Ahmed. "Arabic "Free Verse": The Problem of Terminology. "Journal of Arabic Literature 24.2 (1993): 185-98. Web. 12 Jan. 2017

Anderson, Benedict. "Imagined Communities." The Post-Colonial Studies Reader. 2nd ed. New York: Routledge, 2006. 123-126. Print.

Apter, Emily S. *Against World Literature: On the Politics of Untranslatability*. London: Verso, 2013. Print.

Atkinson, William. "The Perils of World Literature." *World Literature Today* 80.5 (2006): 43-47. Web. 16 Sep. 2016.

Batatu, Hanna. *The Old Social Classes and the Revolutionary Movements of Iraq.* Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1978. Print.

Boullata, Issa. "Badr Shākir al-Sayyāb and the Free Verse Movement." *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 1.3 (1970): 248-58. Web. 21 June 2016.

Boullata, Issa. "The Poetic Technique of Badr Shākir al-Sayyāb." *Journal of Arabic Literature* 2 (1971): 104-15. Web. 27 Nov. 2016.

Colla, Elliott. "Badr Shākir al-Sayyāb, Cold War Poet." *Middle Eastern Literatures* 18.3 (2015): 247-63. Web. 9 Jan. 2017.

Damrosch, David. "Introduction": "Gilgamesh's Quest," in *What Is World Literature?* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2003), 1-77.

DeYoung, Terri. "Empty Spaces and Unveiled Placeholders." *Placing the Poet: Badr Shākir al-Sayyāb and Postcolonial Iraq.* SUNY. Print.

Eagleton, Terry. *How To Read Literature.* New Haven: Yale University Press, 2013. Print.

El-Azma, Nazeer. "The Tammūzī Movement and the Influence of T. S. Eliot on Badr

Shākir al-Sayyāb." *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 88.4 (1968): 671-78. Web.

21 June 2016.

Eliot. T.S. "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock". *Poetry Foundation.* N.p., n.d. Web.

30 Nov. 2016.

Eliot. T.S. "Tradition and the Individual Talent." *The Norton Anthology of Theory and

Criticism.* 2nd ed. New York: Norton & Company, 2010. 955-61. Print.

Eliot. T.S. "The Waste Land". *Poetry Foundation.* N.p., n.d. Web. 30 Nov. 2016.

Finch, Robert. "Notes on Arabic Prosody." *Alif: Journal of Comparative Poetics* 4

(1984): 42-62. Web. 29 Oct. 2016.

Imru' al-Qays. "Mu'allaqat Imru' al-Qays." *Princeton Online Arabic Poetry Project.*

Princeton, n.d. Web. 29 Oct. 2016.

Hassan, Wail S. "Postcolonial Theory and Modern Arabic Literature: Horizons of

Application." Journal of Arabic Literature 33.1 (2002): 45-64. Web. 21 June 2016.

Hobbs, Mark. "Divers Are a Pearl's Best Friend: Pearl Diving in the Gulf 1840s-1930s."

Qatar Digital Library. N.p., n.d. Web. 18 Sept. 2016.

Jayyusi, Salma Khadra. *Modern Arabic Poetry: An Anthology.* 1ˢᵗ ed. New York: Columbia University Press, 1987. Print.

Kadhim, Hussein. "Rewriting "The Waste Land": Badr Shākir al-Sayyāb's "Fī Al-Maghrib Al-'Arabī"" *Journal of Arabic Literature* 30.2 (1999): 128-70. Web. 21 June 2016.

Labīd ibn Rabīʻa. *The Golden Ode.* 2ⁿᵈ ed. Cairo: American University in Cairo Press, 1977. Print.

Lazarus, Neil. "Modernism and African Literature." The Oxford Handbook of Global Modernisms. New York: Oxford University Press, 2012. 228-45. Print.

Ouyang, Wen-chin. "Text, Space and the Individual in the Poetry of Badr Shākir al-Sayyāb: Nationalism, Revolution and Subjectivity." Sensibilities of the Islamic Mediterranean: Self Expression in a Muslim Culture from Post-Classical Times to the Present Day. London: I.B.Tauris, 2008. 330-42. Print.

Parry, Benita. "Problems in Current Theories of Colonial Discourse." The Post-Colonial Studies Reader. 2nd ed. New York: Routledge, 2006. 44-51. Print.

Ryding, Karin C. *Early Medival Arabic: Studies on al-Khalīl ibn Aḥmad*. 1ˢᵗ ed. Washington, D.C.: Georgetown University Press, 1998. Print.

Said, Edward. "The Text, the World, the Critic." The Bulletin of the Midwest Modern Language Association 8.2 (1975): 1-23. Web. 29 June 2016.

Sanni, Amidu. "On "Taḍmīn" (Enjambent) and Structural Coherence in Classical Arabic Poetry". *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London* 52.3 (1989): 463-66. Web. 30 Nov. 2016.

Serequeberhan, Tsenay. "The Critique of Eurocentrism." The Post-Colonial Studies Reader. 2nd ed. New York: Routledge, 2006. 89-92. Print.

Shawqī, Aḥmed. *al-Mawsū'a al-Shawqīyya* 1st ed. Beirut: Dār al-Kītāb al-'Arabī, 1994. Print.

Simawe, Saadi. "Modernism & Metaphor in Contemporary Arabic Poetry." *World Literature Today* 75.2 (2001). Web. 21 June. 2016.

Slemon, Stephen. "The Scramble for Post-Colonialism". The Post-Colonial Studies Reader. 2nd ed. New York: Routledge, 2006. 51-56. Print.

Spivak, Gayatri Chakravorty, "Can the Subaltern Speak?" *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture* (1988): 271-313. Web. 21 June 2016

Talbayev, Edwige Tamalet. "Berber Poetry and the Issue of Derivation: Alternate Symbolist Trajectories." The Oxford Handbook of Global Modernisms. New York: Oxford University Press, 2012. 81-108. Print.