

WESTERN MODERNISM TRANSLATED AND RETRANSLATED IN IRAQI POETRY: AL SAYYAB BETWEEN ELIOT AND SITWELL

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ABSTRACT

This article is part of the bigger project of my PhD thesis which investigates the influence of the British war poetry of the twentieth century on the development of Iraqi poetry in the century/Plymouth University/UK. The article examines the influences of British poetry on the development of the forms of poetry in Iraq after the Second World War. The aim is to shed the light on the creation of the 'third product' or the Iraqi poetry that shows the influences of the translated British poetry or the 'second product'; which was written in prose for it is almost impossible to transfer the rhyme and rhythm of poetry from one language to another. Those who translated the poetry were also the pioneers of the major formal revolution in Arabic poetry and they were also influenced by the 'first product' which is the Poetry written in English language and its modern free forms. T. S. Eliot is one of the main influences that initiated the massive changes in the form of writing Arabic poetry which for the first time was written in the free verse form. The poetry of BadrShakir Al Sayyab (1926-1964), the Iraqi poet and the celebrated prince of the free verse movement in Arabic poetry, shows these influence and sample of his poems are analyzed in this article to reveal the influences of the poetry of T. S. Eliot and Edith Sitwell on his poetry.

KEYWORDS: Al Sayyab, Free Verse, Iraqi Poetry, War Poetry, Arabic Poetry, T. S. Eliot, Edith Sitwell, Third Product, Poetry Forms, Poetry Translations, Modernism, Modern Poetry, WWII, Post-WII, Iran-Iraq War 1980s

INTRODUCTION

The revolutionary spirit that dominates the writings of the young poets shows the impact of the events which followed World War II in Iraq. The country became a cultural sponge absorbing all the resources that reflected different cultures coming from the Western world. Iraqi intellectuals found themselves surrounded by an environment after World War II, which exposed them to new possibilities and confronted them with new artistic theories and literary schools such as Surrealism, Symbolism and Existentialism. From an individual perspective they were looking for shelter in those literary schools to find a technique that could serve their particular style. The style required should provide them with a means of ambiguity and a channel by which they could publish their writing and which would at the same time protect them from the perils of this process. The translation process which developed was a creative act in itself. It was "the second product" and the lifeline that brought to Iraqi cultural salons the exotic symbols of the West. BadrShakirAl Sayyab particularly developed awareness of a new creative intertextuality, which is a translation into Arabic as described by Ali Al Batal (1984: 10) who considered it to be another influence of English poetry on the development of Iraqi poetry. Batal suggests; in his book *The Shadow of Cain: Between Edith Sitwell and Badir Shaker Alsayyab* (1984: 10), that the great role of Edmund Wilson should be acknowledged because he introduced what Stanley Hyman called 'the translation within the

language itself". He made it possible to read, understand and appreciate the value of writing such as that of Joyce and Eliot. If this is true within the English language itself, then translating their work into Arabic could likewise serve the purpose of creating the mystery Iraqi poets sought, as for instance in the works of Al Sayyab.

In addition to the techniques of ancient mythological reference this adaptation of what Hyman refers to as Wilson's "translation within the language" enabled poets to create a technique whereby translation of Eliot's lines into Arabic could be used to provide the means of a creative new style mysterious or ambiguous enough to ensure a safe zone of expression at a dangerous political time. Raghad Al ma'ani believes that this is the reality of this process and Iraqi poets started to reflect their translation of Western literature in their poems in a process which she described, in her article 'T. S. Eliot and BadrShakir Al Sayyab's talent in "A City Without Rain", as a retranslation of the Western counterpart into Arabic poetry. Through this the break with the restrictions of traditional Arabic poetry materialized for poets such as Al Sayyab, Nazik Al Malai'ka, Baland Al Haidari and other Arabic Writers.

The reason which drove the feelings of the Iraqi poets towards the need of inevitable change is the incapability of the language of the traditional poetic forms to keep pace with the changing world. Eliot's words spoke to them directly of the means of change and its routes:

And other withered stumps of time
 Were told upon the walls; staring forms
 Leaned out, leaning, hushing the room enclosed.
 Footsteps shuffled on the stairs.
 Under the firelight, under the brush, her hair
 Spread out in fiery points
 Glowed into words, then would be savagely still.

(Eliot *The Waste Land* cited in North ed. 2001: 9)

The translation of these lines into Arabic describes a dull reality and static forms hanging on gloomy walls and enclosed in a withered room. The implication of the image evokes communication between the poets and the reality of what their language articulates. The lines also describe what can be a possible solution to these 'staring forms' if they are exposed to the firelight and draw the glowing words out of their 'savagely still' reality. SadiqGohar, another Iraqi critic, suggests that such images provided Iraqi poets with what they were looking for 'a new poetics able to confront the new realities emerging in the area' (Gohar: 41). Gohar added that 'Al Sayyab and the young generation of Arab poets who dominated the scene after the war found a refuge in European modernism, particularly the poetry of the French symbolists and T. S. Eliot' (Gohar: 41). The significance of proposing this change was in its relation to the social and political traditions rendered unsuitable by the global changes taking place all over the world and particularly in Iraq. They wanted to challenge the conventions and transfer the new Western experience to Arab and Iraqi society, despite facing a difficult confrontation with the social and literary Arab and Iraqi society, as well as with the dominating political authority. Eliot's words opened a path of communication between the poets and their language. The poem's vision, and not only its language, represented a new daring invitation to have a conversation with the language in lines such as 'You ought to be

ashamed, I said, to look so antique.' The discourse of Eliot's words deals with a woman who should take more care of herself and put some make - up on and should not look so old while she is still 'thirty one' and waiting for her husband who has spent a long time away at war. These words could represent a means of addressing language to renew itself and to extricate itself from the war and revolutionary reality in order to adapt itself to a new contemporary reality. The word language in Arabic is feminine. This might enable the conversation between Lil and her friend to be interpreted by the Iraqi poets as a representation of a conversation between a poet and language instead of that with a woman. In the 1980's the poets were more daring to address language directly and express their dissent with colloquial phrases such as 'Hey! Language!, take your coat off my words!' (Hattab 1989: 272). This experimental experience opened the door for more complicated changes in the late 1970s and 1980s with the beginning of the Iran-Iraq War. The war reality formed different challenges and the poets' experience was directed towards a more fascinating form of what is now called the prose poem which was and continues to be a controversial issue in Arabic poetry.

However this experimentation did not start as a smooth process of change but as a 'wave of rage', as Mardan described it in 1972, and a deep analysis of the Western generations who represented the reality of the post-World War One world as well as that after World War Two:

The generation that followed WWI was characterized by its deep understanding of organization. Some of the revolutionary movements proved this direction towards control and guidance true, and were able to achieve great victories in the field of politics and ideology...WWII helped to split the capitalist sea, and the invisible depth was clear with all its filthy residue.... here poetry was everywhere and was performing its role in the singing during the international holy march...The Arab people are not isolated anymore, all the revolutionary tributaries in the world are directed to them and now driving them to rage....(Hussein Mardan 'The young modern poetry movement' 1972, Taher 2010: 188-89).

The revolutionary tributaries fed the new movements in the Arab world. The impulse of rage caused by the World Wars reached the Middle East and was driving people to act by starting their own cultural revolution. Adapting Western models which are not only different in language, but also different in culture was not only a technique but an aim. It appears in Al Sayyab's poems as a sign of creativity and dissent. The use of foreign references and mythology is attractive and takes the reader to a new dimension of modern technological imagery of faraway lands and strange stories. The type of the new poetry urged readers to use their imagination in its full power to visualize a wider world and a modern sensibility. At the same time it served the purpose of Iraqi poets to produce mysterious or ambiguous pieces of writing that invite an effort at interpretation because at that point their mysterious feature was part of the pleasure of reading poetry in a new rhythm.

Badr Shaker Al Sayyab, the acknowledged prince of this movement, was born in 1926 in a small village called Jekor, south of Basra in Iraq.¹ Al Sayyab finished his education in Baghdad and graduated from the Higher Teachers' Training College of Baghdad in 1948. He was dismissed from teaching for his membership in the Iraqi Communist Party (Atwan 1997: 177). Later he published a series of essays and confessions explaining his renunciation of the Communist Party, which were published in 1959 and collected and published again in one book under the same title *I Was A*

¹ Al Sayyab published the first poem that is considered the first free verse poem in Arabic poetry. However it is still debated as to who wrote the first free verse, Al Sayyab or Nazik Al Mala'ika, an Iraqi poetess and one of the pioneers of the free verse movement in Arabic poetry, who also published poems in free verse form around the same time and was later one of the traditionalist opposition to the prose poem in Iraqi literature.

Communist (2007). He is considered one of the great icons of Arabic literature for his experimental literary works which represented the free verse movement of modern Arabic poetry. Al Sayyab visited the United Kingdom for the first time in 1962 for a translation course at Durham University (Diwan Al Arab 2006). In his thirties, Al Sayyab suffered a degenerative nervous disorder and died young and in poverty in a hospital in Al Kuwait in 1964.² In 1955 Al Sayyab published his translation of 20 poems by 20 poets from different Western nationalities including Eliot, Lorca, Ezra Pound, Stephen Spender and Edith Sitwell in his *Selected Poems of Modern World Poetry* (1955). Eliot's *The Waste Land* (1922) was one of the profound influences among these poems and later on appeared to influence his writing, particularly the 'Rain Song' (1969) and many other poems.³ Edith Sitwell's 'Three Poems of the Atomic Age' (1947) was another profound influence, consisting of 'Dirge for the New Sunrise', 'The Canticle of the Rose.', and 'The Shadow of Cain,' to which Al Sayyab published his Arabic counterpart 'Dawn of Peace' (1951) with a second song which had the same title 'The Shadow of Cain'.⁴ The footnotes to the poems, added by Al Sayyab himself, explain some of the terms in them. In addition to the poet's country of birth were a few references saying that these terms demonstrate the influences of Western modernist style (Al Sayyab 1947: 69).

The publication of Al Sayyab's translations inspired an aggressive reaction from the cultural and governmental authorities in Iraq. In fact, Al Sayyab was accused of translating for Western Fascists such as Ezra Pound and those who were believed to have worked for the Western Intelligence services such as Spender (Ahmed 2012). This was only the tip of the iceberg in the battle between the traditionalists and the innovators. However nothing seemed to be able to stop the pioneers from modernizing Arabic poetry and breaking the traditional restrictions of the classical 'Amudi' forms to exchange the symmetrical couplet of the Amudi poetry for freely arranged lines of shortened feet. This marked the start of what Jabra calls 'the war of words' which 'had started over fifty years ago in London with the Imagists, who included T. E. Hulme, Ezra Pound and T. S. Eliot, [and by the 1950s] raged again in the three capitals of Arabic writing: Beirut, Cairo and Baghdad. By analogy, it was difficult to see the rebels destroyed' (Jabra 1971:82).

Eliot is known by Arab poets as an Anglo-American poet. He was born in St Louis, Missouri in America in September 1888. In 1910 he started a tour of Europe including Paris and London as part of his academic degree. However he did not settle in London until the summer of 1914 when he started his doctoral degree at Merton College, Oxford (Cooper 2006: 1-5). Jabra (1971: 81) suggests that the impact of Eliot's writings on the revolutionary Arab free verse movement was 'eruptive and insistent'. This was so, he believes, because these young poets were at the forefront of the formal conflict in Arabic poetry as the pioneers of the free verse movement. Eliot represented a fascination for them because he provided the best equation of interaction between the new dynamics and tradition. Their conscious interest not to appear as ungrateful writers towards their national legacy and heritage was an insistent urge (Jabra 1971: 81). For this reason Eliot's works, particularly *The Waste Land* provided them with the necessary new techniques, including a sense of history concerning the new form of poetry. Al Sayyab was the first among those who introduced international mythology

² A statue of Al Sayyab is erected in the city of Basra in the south of Iraq and is considered one of its main cultural features.

³ Eliot's poem *The Waste Land* was translated into Arabic several times and by several writers and translators including Mohammad Abdul Hai, LuwisAwad and Yousif Al Khal (Abdul Hai 1979: 129-130).

⁴ Al Sayyab translated Sitwell's poems into Arabic and published them in a collection Poems of the Atomic Age: Edith Sitwell. (no date or place are known for this publication they could have been published separately in literary journals and later collected in one volume).

into his poems. Mardan (1970) believes that it is not insensible to think of Al Sayyab as the first rebel. The seeds of rebellion appeared decades before him and the other pioneers, but it was they who were its midwives, and brought it to the light. 'We had then a great shortage of the techniques of expression,' Mardan commented:

The ready forms and dictionary words and the dictatorship of the strict rhyme limited our initial creative innovation. From another side we were exposed to a torrent of waves and topics abounding in Iraqi society in the 1940s...we needed new tools. We challenged, revolted against, and broke the academic style...What helped us was the wind of modernity that came from European literature to remove the ruins from the crossroads, so that we could walk on open roads (Mardan 'The Pioneers in Our Modern Poetry' 1970, Taher 2010: 154).

Rainey reminds his readers that Modernism in the West had flourished at least forty years before 1965 (cited in North ed. 2001:90-91). It seems that this is a reflection on what happened in the West a few decades before the Iraqi poets started their experiments in free poetic form. Gohar (1999) points out that the image of the waste land introduced in Eliot's poem represented a salvation to the young Iraqi poets and provided them with the fragmented image of their own broken city, which they needed to reflect their own reality, in particular, the image of the 'Unreal city' mentioned before and its reflection in the small spaces in Baghdad streets where these poets created for themselves a realm in which to practice their formal experiments. The series of images Al Sayyab created in his poems imaginatively motivates the reader to visualize an open space and a connection with other resources of history. They are meant to motivate a particular emotional reaction that is intended to shock the surrounding dull reality. This sense of a link with world history provided another dimension through which to avoid the traditionalists' criticism. The poems are structured with a cosmopolitan diffusion of fascinating mythology as well as realistic simple connections with modern life where change is the only constant reality. Their fascination with such adaptation of myths left the traditionalists bewildered by these new techniques. In Al Sayyab's poem 'The Sinbad City', he creates an unreal city to reflect his illusions of a modern city experiencing the changing of the seasons in an interaction similar to Eliot's 'The Burial of The Dead':

Hey Spring!,⁵

Hey Spring what is it with you?

You came without rain

Without roses,

Without fruits,

Your end was like your beginning

Wrapped with dark blood...

(Al Sayyab 'The Sinbad City', 1969: 137-138)

Like Eliot, Al Sayyab set the short rhythmical phrases in a form of conversation with inanimate personalized figures such as the seasons of the year. Al Sayyab's words boldly present surprise and question in short lines and leave the reaction to the reader, together with any conclusions. Although spring is a season of joy, this time it is dull because, unlike

⁵ April is the month which represents Spring in Iraqi culture ; both words are used mutually to represent the same thing.

any other spring, it did not bring new changes and joyful excitement. The lines like those presented in Eliot's poem are short and break up Arabic meters into unidentified lengths where only the poet can control the number of measures he needs to finish his sentence. Like Eliot, Al Sayyab then moved to describe summer and link the events that followed the Nationalist (most of them Ba'athist) military revolution in 1963 to mythological allusions of ancient Iraq:

Summer came to us with black clouds
 Its day is just troubles,
 We stay awake in its night to count the stars,
 Until the spikes
 Are ripe to be harvested
 The scythe sang
 And the threshing floor covered the ravines,
 The hungry imagined it was the goddess of the roses
 shtar⁶,
 Brought back the captive to the mortals,
 And crowned his forehead with the fruits,
 The hungry imagined the Messiah's shoulder took away the coffin rock
 And he walked again to resurrect life from the tomb
 And heal the leper and bring back vision?
 Who loosened the wolves' collars?
 Who watered from the mirage?
 And hid the epidemic in the rain?
 Death is born in the houses,
 Cain is born to take life
 From earth's uterus and headwaters
 To bring injustice for tomorrow.⁷

(Al Sayyab 'The Sinbad City', 1969: 137-138)

The reader can directly comprehend the sense of conflict between the good and evil powers in life. It is introduced

⁶ Ishtar is the Eastern Semitic Akkadian Assyrian and Babylonian goddess of fertility, love, war and sex. She is a counterpart to the Sumerian Inanna, and is the cognate for the Northwest Semitic Aramean goddess Astarte (Wilkinson 1998).

⁷My translation.

in the powers of the goddess of war and the redemption of humanity by the Messiah. The lines also bring with them the militant sense Al Sayyab wants, to reflect or more to record this period in the history of Iraq with words such as, “black clouds, spikes, captives, epidemic and death, to bring injustice for tomorrow.’ These images were again not straightforward but more of an interpretation of Eliot’s use of mythology in an Eastern style. Al Sayyab here is not only reflecting the use of myth but also communicating the journey Eliot traces in the ‘Burial of the Dead’, an apocalyptic search for the Savior, ‘the Messiah’, only to find him dead on the cross. Al Sayyab adapted what Deyoung (1998: 203) calls Eliot’s dramatic monologue to communicate a recurring human crisis, wars that are repeated and humans that fail to learn the lessons. He recalled humanity’s first sin and man’s first felony in the image of Cain’s sin, in the last lines.

Al Sayyab anxiously wanted to express his frustration with the endless state of war in Iraq and the Arab countries after WWII. He adapted this dramatic monologue again, in a similar description to that of the vision of the illusions of Eliot’s Prufrock of a man in Hiroshima in the Red Cross hospital suffering from syphilis which filled his mind with illusions during the time when US forces dropped the atomic bomb on the city:

What do those black eyes want from a man
 Who picked up the roses of sins until he met them all?
 Roses on my fevered body, which I pick up
 To make a bouquet of the wounds that are burning.
 The roses I take care of for Tammuz then I give them to him
 In the darkness of the underworld.⁸
 Or is it Eve’s serpent, rewarding me with apples
 While with apples, he seduced her yesterday.⁹
 (Al Sayyab ‘Realities like Illusions’, 1969: 44-45)

The length of the lines expresses the mourning of the poet for these historical symbols or the damnation of their modern representations. In Western Modernism, Rainey suggests, ‘The modernists were obsessed with history. They mourned it and damned it, contested it as tenaciously as Jacob wrestling with the image of God: “I will not let thee go, except thou bless me”’ (Rainey *The Prince of Modernism: Publishing The Waste Land (1991)* cited in North 2001:90). Like the Western modernists, Iraqi poets were fascinated with history, and they were looking for a change that could reconcile their relation to their own history. Therefore Al Sayyab’s generation wanted to adapt history as a useful resource of symbols for their imagism.

During World War II, Arab intellectuals were interested in Marxism, which was Al Sayyab’s first ideological interest (Atwan 1997: 177). Information about the Soviet regime was also made available in the cultural capitals of the Middle East. Later, the call of the Communist Party for freedom and equality secured its position among Iraqi writers, particularly the young poets. However, the Nationalists were already at war with the British forces and were in control of

⁸Tammuz (Hebrew) is the name of a Sumerian god of food and vegetation, also worshiped in the later Mesopotamian states of Akkad, Assyria and Babylonia.

⁹My translation.

Iraq from 1941 (Badawi 1975:21). Badawi argues that before the modern renaissance, which he believes had started by the eighteenth century; Arab intellectuals had not mastered European languages. However, with the great development of the Western powers in the Middle East they started gradually to acquire these languages in many ways but ‘most glaringly on the battlefield’ a matter, which Badawi believes forced the Arab elites to abandon their ‘illusion of self-sufficiency and redirect their energies towards far-reaching reforms for which acquaintance with the achievements of ‘the West’ has been and to a large extent remains essential’ (Badawi 1975: 23).

However, as Jabra pointed out, most of the influences before World War II came from French and European writers, who dominated the Arabic cultural scene, such as Baudelaire and his influence. It was after World War II that Arab, and particularly Iraqi, poets started to develop more interest in ‘Anglo-Saxon’ writers such as Eliot (Jabra 1971:). Jabra suggests that ‘perhaps only the war could bring about such a feeling of cosmic catastrophe in a young man of Eliot’s age then, but here was a transcendence of the personal to the universal, and a myth was a necessary understructure for the poem’s scope’ (Jabra 1971: 83). This transcendence from the personal to the universal of the young Eliot’s reaction to the Great War was no less than the reaction of the young Iraqi poets who were under the influence of the consequences of those wars in the West. Eliot helped those young poets to make cunning use of a resourceful technique, which employed variety and surprise as the skills needed for writing poetry and not only the mastery of language and traditional rhetorical forms:

Until 1950, nothing could be more unlike Arabic poetry than "The Wasteland": the endless juxtapositions, the sudden jumps, the parodies, the quotations and deliberate misquotations, the mixture of the sublime and the ridiculous, the use of different languages, free verse, rhymed verse, the fusion of St. Augustine and Buddha, of Dante and Webster, the high-flown eloquence and the music-hall language, the Fisher King and the Hanged God, Tiresias and Jesus at Emmaus and Phlebas the Phoenician, the "Unreal City" and the "falling towers" a veritable orchestration of verbal and symbolic means, all previously quite unknown in Arabic poetry. (Jabra 1971:84).

The reaction to Eliot’s *The Waste Land* optimized the revolutionary spirit in the writers who held the seeds of change and needed a spark to ignite the cultural scene with their innovations. Batal (1984:71) quotes the Iraqi poet Baland Al Haidari speaking, lamenting Al Sayyab after his death, saying:

We were not 20 yet; the world was declining with the touches of the war ruins and its influences. There were many calls speaking to us through the ruins of Europe in the form of poetry and prose, and stories, like poetry, that included a revolution and anger, it included the strangeness and the excitement which attracted our attention.... Some days later we were escaping from our silence, or our anticipation of a silent night, to a house of a friend to listen to the voices of Eliot, Sitwell and Dylan Thomas until very late at night, Badr always insisted that we have to listen to Sitwell again, and the record rolls again and again for more than half an hour, and we were trapped at the door several times while Sitwell’s voice still rang in our minds that consistent, rough voice- rolling on the record’s internal rings (Baland Al Haidari quoted in Batal 1984: 71).

For the first time, these young poets were reading and listening to Eliot saying ‘Speak to me. Why do you never speak? Speak. What are you thinking of? What thinking? What? I never know what you are thinking. Think.’ (Eliot *The Waste Land*. North 2001: 17). Their reaction to these words was no less than the Western writers’ reaction in the 1920s. Al Sayyab wrote in his poem ‘To The Beauty of The Palace’ (from his second poetry collection *Flowers and Myths* 1950):

'Let "The Waste Land" plant on the top of the sad star, its cactuses; we will fill tomorrow's world with Jasmine' (Al Sayyab, Batal 1984: 72). Although Al Sayyab did not admit this influence until 1956¹⁰, after he had dissociated himself from the Iraqi communist party, these lines stoked the flames of revolution in poetry and in the actual world as well. Al Sayyab commented on his attraction to Eliot's poetry, saying: 'I like Thomas Eliot, but [am] no more influenced by his style' (Al Sayyab quoted in Ahmed, A. 2012. BadrShakir Al Sayyab The Sound of the Poet Translator... the Marxist who Became Deviant! *The Third Power*, The Gate of Poetry and Literature). Ali (1978:50) argues that this was not the case and that Al Sayyab did not express his admiration of Eliot's works publicly, because of his revolutionary Marxist tendencies. However when he published his translation collection in 1955, he commented on the criticism he received for these translations, saying that he was not a Marxist anymore so why should they judge his behaviour on Marxist principles and accuse him of deviation. Al Sayyab made it clear that he made his selection of the poems for translation first, and that he chose the ones that featured a high public humanitarian spirit (Ahmed 2012). Al Sayyab's own poetry collection *The Rain Song* (1969) shows Eliot's influence on his choice of images. Reading Eliot's recurring lines in 'What The Thunder Said':

If there were water
 And no rock
 If there were rock
 And also water
 A spring
 A pool among the rock
 If there were the sound of water only
 Not the cicada
 And dry grass singing
 But sound of water over a rock
 Where the hermit-thrush sings in the pine trees,
 Drip drop drip drop droptropdrop,
 But there is no water.

(Eliot *The Waste Land* (1922), cited in North 2001: 17)

Eliot tries to delineate a picture of a dreadful event. The heroic figure which humans are looking for is dead and they are left alone. Their journey is intractably broken periodically. Humans are left like rocks without water. Rain is the hope of resurrection but there is no hope of rain. The bewilderment of the speaker in those lines is no different from those who are suffering the dryness and harshness of life in the mountains between the rocks. 'He who was living is now dead' and 'we who were living are now dying, with a little patience' (Eliot 'What the Thunder Said' from *The Waste Land*, North ed. 2001: 16). It is a process, Eliot suggests, and we will all be touched, with a little patience. Among these horrible

¹⁰ Al Sayyab added a footnote identifying the poem as the poem of the Reactionary Poet Eliot (Batal 1984:72).

events there is a bird singing, there is a sound of water even if there is no water; there is hope in other words. Eliot, like his contemporaries, was searching for an outlet for the light amid the declining world created by the Great War. However, as Eliot points out, it only led to other more severe conflicts breaking out, such as WWII, with subsequent continual global conflicts that left the Middle East, particularly Iraq, in a continuous state of war, despite the end of the actual wars on land. Al Sayyab, like Eliot, anticipated the results of these conflicts, and reflected these images, though not exactly, in poems such as 'The Sinbad City'. However, Al Ma'ani believes, it can be read as a retranslation of Eliot's poem into Arabic poetry, or at least as creative intertextuality:

As if arches of mist were drinking the clouds
 Drop by drop dissolved in the rain
 And the children burst into laughter in the vineyard bowers
 The rain song tickled the silence of the sparrows on trees,
 Rain
 Rain
 Rain
 The evening yawned and the clouds were still
 pouring their heavy tears.

(Al Sayyab 'The Rain Song' (1969), cited in
 Al-Muttalibi 2012: 14)¹¹

Al Sayyab not only reflected Eliot's vision in his lines but also wanted to make use of Eliot's language. In *The Rain Song (1969)* Al Sayyab put his lines into Arabic metrical rhythm but the number of the measures was not the same as the symmetrical couplet of the classical style. Al Sayyab, like Eliot, used the technique of recurring words, such as 'rain', 'drop' and 'water' which is not a familiar technique in Arabic poetry, except in the Saj', which is a rhymed prose form similar to that used in the Quran's verse, and which is considered prose only and cannot be referred to as poetry. It was used in Arabic prose literature such as the *One Thousand and One Nights*. What Al Sayyab was looking for, as he points out, is a line that is able to reflect a public humanitarian image. This image can touch on the simple man who is suffering the consequences of political decisions as well as on the flow of Western philosophy into Arabic culture after World War II. Language and poetry should not be confined to the high cultural elite, Al Sayyab believed. To create free verse is to create a new culture, where the expression of the aggressiveness of life is possible and not an infamous action. Iraqi people by the 1950s had been involved in two World Wars. It was time for them to 'speak' about it and share the wars' misery and the post-war degradation. Al Sayyab, at this point was expressing Eliot's transcendence from what is personal to the universal from the sense of war as national crisis to the understanding of war as an international global strife. Hence, Eliot's language, like his experience, featured in Al Sayyab's poems as much as Sitwell's 'Shadow of Cain' echoes in his poetry. Eliot's poetry provided Al Sayyab and his generation with the means and the ideas to achieve a fundamental

¹¹'The Rain Song' is translated by the editor Khulood Al Mutalibi.

revolution in Iraq's history, and brought Modernism to Iraqi literature.

Al Sayyab skillfully adapted Eliot's techniques and images, such as the singing birds, trees and water in different shapes, drops and rain. The lines sound cheerful with their hope and rain, and then the rain is described as the result of the heavy tears of the clouds, to ensure for the reader the same impression Eliot's reader receives from *The Waste Land's* lines. Moreover, Al Sayyab, like Eliot, used the image of the rain and winter as the means of washing away humans' pains and of bringing peace:

Winter kept us warm, covering

Earth in forgetful snow, feeding

A little life with dried tubers.

(Eliot *The Waste Land* (1922), cited in North 2001: 5)

In Al Sayyab's words:

Do you know what sorrows the rain can prompt?

And how gutters sob when it pours down?

Do you know how lost a lonely person feels in the rain

Endlessly like bloodshed, the hungry, love, children and the dead

It is the rain.

(Al Sayyab 'The Rain Song' (1969), cited in

Al-Muttalibi 2012: 15)

Winter for Al Sayyab is different from that described by Eliot. Snow is replaced by rain.¹² Both forms of weather cover the city and its features. Though both images are supposed to describe a peaceful atmosphere, they reflect a gloomy reality and the suffering of the innocent. This profound influence appears in the Iraqi context, where poetry was made available and comprehensible for everyone in simple language that does not glorify history but mourns its influence on the present.

Ali (1978) suggests that it was myth which was an active factor in Eliot's poetry and which was attractive to Al Sayyab. As much as myths are related to the academic study of history they are also related to the simple historical details of people's daily lives. They enable Al Sayyab to communicate with his inner needs and purposes and with the same aspects in his readers' human nature and its depths. It was more than welcomed in the poetry of Al Sayyab, especially as he relied on the legacy of myths available from ancient Iraqi history. His poems included several examples of references to those myths, including the ancient gods and goddesses such as the aforementioned Tammuz and Ishtar:¹³

¹² Iraq is characterized by a hot arid climate with subtropical influences. Winter might bring some rainfall. However it is not expected to snow except on rare occasions in the northern region.

¹³ Tammuz God of vegetation and food, Ishtar or Innana Goddess of love and war who represented the conflict of life and death in ancient Sumerian and Babylonian myths

The reasons which led Al Sayyab to adapt myth in his poetry are similar to the reasons which led Eliot to adapt it in his poetry. Badr meets the poets of his generation in using the myth to interpret the crisis of modern man and re-evaluate human experience in the light of a present weighted with the problem of civilization...Eliot's poetry proposes a similar reason to resort to myth and discover it as the modern reality's reaction towards a perished past to reconnect man to the springs of liveliness and joy (Abbas 1972: 188-190).

However, Al Sayyab did not only use ancient Iraqi mythology. He translated Eliot's myths and retranslated them into poetry:

Madame Sosostriis, famous clairvoyant,
 Had a bad cold, nevertheless
 Is known to be the wisest woman in Europe,
 With a wicked pack of cards. Here, said she,
 Is your card, the drowned Phoenician Sailor,
 (Those are pearls that were his eyes. Look!)¹⁴

(Eliot *The Waste Land* (1922), cited in North 2001: 6)

This material appears in Al Sayyab's intertextual construction:

The Goddess of Iron, Copper and Destruction,
 Your father is the ocean sailor, who slept in the ocean bed
 The traders sell those pearls in his eyes
 And your share is the tears and the oysters
 And a fierce storm of iron bolts
 And that resilient jingling from faraway
 For whom does it jingle, for whom "Kongaa, Kongaa"?¹⁵
 The gypsies decided to leave to "Granada"?
 The winds become green, the brook, and the moon?
 Or Christ is crucified to triumph
 And his blood planted flowers in the rock?¹⁶

¹⁴One of the number of borrowings from Shakespeare's *The Tempest*, 1.3., this line is from the song the spirit Ariel sings to Ferdinand of his father's supposed drowning. (North 2001: 6).

¹⁵Kongaa is one of the myths of a Chinese king who wanted a huge Naqosa made from gold, iron, silver and copper. But different metals would not unite and he consulted Kongaa. She is the daughter of the ruler seer, Vonboha, and thought that metals would not unite unless mixed with the blood of a virgin girl. Thus Kongaa threw herself into the huge cauldron of smelted metals..where was the bell, which continued to echo Kongaa whenever it rang "Hiaa.. KongaaKongaa.. .."

(Al Sayyab 'Revelation of Vukaa', 1969: 40)

The lines of the poem are almost as long as Eliot's lines. Moreover, in this poem Al Sayyab extensively uses Eliot's technique of inserting words in foreign languages and adopts original myths suggested by these words to emulate his own reality. The publisher's notes on the poem point out that Eliot used Ariel's song as a symbol of life in his poem *The Waste Land*, surviving death; however Al Sayyab changed the meaning by adding 'The traders sell those pearls in his eyes' to reflect his own reality. Al Sayyab added another myth to the images, that of Kongaa, to reflect the conflicting political powers in Iraq. He gives these parties the shape of conflicting metals that could only change to bolts in the heart of their people, leading them to abandon their homeland for the city of great Arabic victories 'Granada', together with which Al Sayyab chose to finish his lines with two lines from Lorca's *Gypsy Ballads*.

Like Eliot's poems, Al Sayyab's poems were published with textual notes to interpret the meaning of various words and symbols. Most of the notes refer back to the original text adopted, such as in the aforementioned lines, where the publisher directly refers to Al Sayyab's source of symbols in Eliot's *The Waste Land*. In another case the notes explain the original story behind the mythical references used in Al Sayyab's poems. However the notes sometimes do not make things very clear to the readers as there always seems to be a vague reference behind the lines as sometimes happens in Eliot's notes. A close reading of Al Sayyab's lines enables the reader to receive the impression that Al Sayyab intentionally used this technique of sequences of related or unrelated images. This technique in itself can be read as an adaptation of Eliot's objective correlative, which Al Ma'ani suggests Eliot used in his poems. Eliot defines this concept as follows: 'The only way of expressing emotions in the form of art is by finding an objective correlative; in other words, a set of objects, a situation, a chain of events which shall be the formula of that particular emotion; such that when the external facts, which must terminate in sensory experience are given, the emotion is immediately evoked.' (Eliot "Hamlet and His Problems" (1919).¹⁷ Al Ma'ani suggests that AL Sayyab used this technique to force his reader to grasp the wholeness of the apparently disconnected images, in order to form the message conveyed by the poem.(eg) This is a technique, which Loya (1971: 196) points out, is used by Eliot in *The Waste Land*, particularly in 'What The Thunder Said' where Eliot used 'a set of fragmented extended images which seem to be unrelated but their implications are contrived by him to converge into a coherent whole,' a technique which resembles what Al Sayyab did in 'The Sinbad City'. Both Eliot's and Al Sayyab's imagery of the changing seasons can be read as an example of this technique.

Edith Sitwell (1887-1964) was another profound influence on Al Sayyab's poetry. Sitwell is an English poet and writer who is described as extraordinary and eccentric but one of the great figures of the first half of the twentieth century 'With her Saturday-night salons, and her editorship of the journal *Wheels*, Sitwell established herself as an enemy of the old (specifically of the Georgian poets) and a cheerleader of the new; her own work, especially *Facade*, first performed in 1923, reinforced this impression.' (Cooke 2011). These revolutionary features in both the writing of Sitwell and in her character made her one of the main attractions for Arab and particularly Iraqi poets. If Eliot represents the influence of the freedom of form and creative style, Sitwell represents the influence of the revolutionary vision and post-war subversion. Batal (1984: 9) argues that traces of 'The Shadow of Cain' can be detected in most of Al Sayyab's poems, from the moment he read Sitwell's poem early in his life until the last poems he wrote in hospital before he died. This includes his

¹⁶My translation.

¹⁷Cited in J. A. Cuddon's Dictionary of Literary Terms, page 647.

most famous poem the 'Rain Song' which reveals a lot of Eliot's influences but the title also indicates the impact of Sitwell's song poems.

Any study of Al Sayyab's poem 'The Shadow of Cain' (1952), Batal (1984: 10) added, is not only a study of the translated modern symbols in his poetry but also the study of a retranslation of the translation within the language itself. Here Batal refers to the long process of interpretation that took place inside the mind of a poet such as Al Sayyab. It involves the 'formation of images and symbols in the mind of the writer within a huge space of knowledge and understanding of cultures' (Batal 1984: 11). It is the creation of an experimental science in literature whose study should include 'literary criticism, art/literature history and comparative literature, besides anthropology and natural sciences and history and experimental sciences, to conclude with the literary analysis of these literary works' (Batal 1984: 12).

Critics, such as Mary Teresa (1967: 35-40) suggest that the later poems of Edith Sitwell show more maturity and are able to convey 'experiences of tragic grandeur and intensity'. This, Mary Teresa points out, could be related to the deep influence of Christianity on her 'themes, symbolism and imagery' (1967: 35-40). In her poem "Lullaby" this influence is 'implied rather than explicit', Teresa believes. The poem introduces comments on the irony of war and its devastation for the youth and the children:

Though the world has slipped and gone

Sounds my loud discordant cry

Like the steel bird's song on high:

Still one thing is left-the Bone!

Then out danced the Babioun.

She sat in the hollow of the sea-

A socket whence the eye's put out-

She sang to the child a lullaby

(The steel bird's nest was thereabout.)¹⁸

(Edith Sitwell "Lullaby" cited in Reeds 1944)

Sitwell presents a scene from the war where the mother of the child is killed and he is left with the Babioun that helped comfort him and sing him a lullaby. Sitwell suggests that humans cannot descend further than to lack the compassion of the animals towards one another. The world, Sitwell says 'has slipped and gone' and this is nothing to feel sorry about. It is filled with meaninglessness and only nature can provide comfort to the innocent humans symbolized by the child. This symbolism is one of the main attractions of Al Sayyab to Sitwell's poems. Her imagery is cosmopolitan and at the same time she provides the reader with the space to articulate the symbols of her poems. The influence of these lines on Al Sayyab was more than just the provision of a means of articulation ; he added a note to his poem "The Revelation of Vukaa" informing the reader that he 'almost literally' quoted from Sitwell's lines: 'they are quoted from the poem

¹⁸REED, H. 1944. The Poetry of Edith Sitwell. In: LEHMANN, J. (ed.) *The Penguin New Writing*. England: Penguin Books)

“Lullaby” by the English poet Edith Sitwell in which the Babioun sits in the depth of the river to rock the cradle of the human child- whose mother was killed by the steel bird- and she sings to him, becoming –she the babioun- a mother and an adviser of the human child’ (Al Sayyab 1969: 41).

Sitwell’s symbolism can be an articulation of the understanding that the Spring of a chaotic, horrific world could not result in more destruction than the scientific material development of massive weapons such as the atomic bombs. The waves of this Western scientific Spring cast their shadow on the Middle East and created a series of conflicts that have marked the reality of the Middle East until this day. Al Sayyab reinterpreted Sitwell’s symbolism in his description of the massive effects of the atomic bomb:

A Shadow of Cain dropped its heavy darkness,
 charcoal that filled the world with worry
 The aggressor confronted it with his eye balls
 stoking them with rising and falling flames
 If it rises the whole space is filled with
 angry sparks and oozes with boiling blood and sweat
 And attacks from where the sun sets,
 a night of black bombardment or twilight
 The crawling infant wakes up,
 standing on his feet, running and twisting his body with his neck
 As long as he turns to be unbending
 while suffocating with a fire that fuses his blue veins.¹⁹

(Al Sayyab ‘The Shadow of Cain’, *Dawn of Peace*

1951,cited in Batal 1984: 79)

The poem is loaded with vocabulary that suggests a militant and violent reality, such as ‘heavy darkness, the aggressors, worry, charcoal, falling flames, angry sparks, boiling blood, attacks, bombardment, suffocating and blue veins’. The poem reflects a war state in a time when the country was officially internally at peace but there was actually both violent revolutionary change inside the country and it was also involved with the general Arab war with Israel. Al Sayyab depicted a militant reality that dominated Iraq and other Arab countries in the post-World War Two era. The dominating image is the shadow of Cain which suggests man’s first sin and his original violent nature. In other poems, ‘Reimbursement’ and ‘Realities like Illusions’, the second and third songs respectively of the ‘Revelation of Vukaa,’

¹⁹My translation. Batal argues in his analysis of Al Sayyab’s ‘Dawn of Peace’ that it is just a simple interpretation of Sitwell’s poem that marked Al Sayyab’s early experimental retranslation of ‘The Shadow of Cain’. The poem failed to serve its first purpose which is the call of peace for the world creating an atmosphere of horror in a series of images of fire, bloodshed and death. We should not forget, Batal added, that the gap between the two writers is big. Sitwell was enjoying the peak of artistic maturity and encyclopedic knowledge .

published in his *The Rain Song* collection (1969: 42-49), Al Sayyab again recalls the shadow of Cain as a symbol of the everlasting war:

“Cain” is still here, even if his rock is exchanged

for a sword, or his ready sword becomes fire.

And “Abel” is paid back for what he had suffered

By His Creator and with his name the nations are

paid back.²⁰

(Al Sayyab ‘Reimbursement’, 1969: 43)

By placing the images of Cain and Abel side by side in his poem, Al Sayyab introduced the Western trope of conflicting forces to the Arab world. Like Sitwell, these religious or mythological symbols in Al Sayyab’s lines symbolize the immortality and frailty of humans. It symbolizes, as in Sitwell’s poems, Ghani suggests, ‘a prophetic vision of the modern crisis and a revelation of its significance’ (Ghani: 13):

In ‘The Shadow of Cain,’ Sitwell spoke of the change from the worship of the holy, living, life - giving gold of the wheat to the destructive gold Dives, of the change from the warmth of love that makes all men brothers to the state in which men only call their fellow men ‘brothers’ in order to act the part of Cain, of the migration of mankind, after the Second Fall, which took the shape of separation of brother and brother, Abel and Cain, rich and poor (Ghani : 14-15)

Al Sayyab is creating the counterparts which emulate the modern Western dualism of the conflicting mythological principle, the dionysian and the apollonian, the wild and the wise, the violent and the peaceful, the dualism of war and peace itself. Al Sayyab looked back to this symbol of the Shadow of Cain, and tried to communicate it in every national crisis to reflect the destruction of war and connect this to the myth of the first human violence and crime. In his poem ‘The Caravan of Loss’ he urges the Arabs to answer the call of their brothers in Palestine, connecting their silence to Cain’s felony:

Did you see the caravan of loss? Did you see the immigrants?

Those who are carrying on their shoulders, from the years’ famines

The sins of all the sinners

Those who bleed without blood

Marching backwards

To bury “Abel”, while he is a pile of mud on the cross?

“Cain where is your brother? Where is your brother?”

Heaven collected its limits to shout. The stars conglomerated to a call

“Cain, where is your brother?”

²⁰ My translation

“He is in the refugee camp

Tuberculosis weakens his arms, I brought him the medication

The hunger is Adam’s first sin and the legacy of the doomed.²¹

(Al Sayyab ‘The Caravan of Loss’, 1969:50)

Al Batal (1984: 15) believed that Sitwell herself was influenced by Eliot’s visual sense and verbal music, such as that which captivated Al Sayyab in Sitwell’s poem “Lullaby”. What attracts Al Sayyab in Sitwell’s poems is the depth of her images and her profound expression of human tragedies, particularly in wartime. Al Sayyab not only adopted her images in his poems but also rewrote them in a remarkable intertextuality:

Despite the world having joyfully perished

The iron bird is still crossing the sky

And on the ocean bed sleeping

Your orphan child’s eye- where there is no singing

Except the Baboon’s screams ‘your food is the land,

Crawl on all fours, up and down

are the same, and life is death!’

They are the same “Genghis” and Kongaa”

Abel and Cain, Babylon and Shanghai,

Silver and iron are not the same!

Hayee Kongaa, kongaa!

(Al Sayyab ‘Revelation of Vukaa’, 1969: 41)

Al Sayyab’s notes to these lines explain that they are ‘almost literally borrowed’ from Sitwell’s poem ‘Lullaby’ (Façade 1922), where the baboon sits on the ocean bed singing for a human child whose mother was killed by the iron bird, whereas the baboon becomes the mother and teacher of the child. Al Sayyab explains to his readers: ‘Let the readers of my poem notice that there are three related characters in my mind: the Japanese hunter, the Chinese drowned man addressing his daughter, and Ferdinand’s father –who claimed that Ariel had drowned and the baboon who chose the ocean bed as a place for the child’s mother, as in Edith Sitwell’s poem’ (Al Sayyab ‘notes to the ‘Revelation of Vukaa’. *The Rain Song* 1969: 41).

What created this profound influence on Al Sayyab’s mind is the same incentive as that behind Al Sayyab’s fascination with Eliot’s *The Waste Land*. If Eliot’s poem was the mythological creation of the post-war reality of World War I, Batal (1984: 56) argues, then Sitwell’s ‘The Shadow of Cain’ is a symbolic religious creation of the reality of destruction and human degeneration in World War II. The wars created a spiritual crack in both writers and resulted, it is

²¹My translation.

suggested, in Eliot's and Sitwell's religious conversion. Al Sayyab's reaction to the political and social atmosphere of Iraq in the post WWII period can be read as similar to that of Eliot's and Sitwell's. Al Sayyab did not have those religious influences, nor did Islam provide this space for spiritual conversion. However, Al Sayyab spiritually and politically dissociated himself from his strong belief in the Iraqi communist party in the mid-1950s to follow the Nationalists for a short while, until he completely denounced all political interests in 1960, a stance maintained until his death in December 1964 (Batal 1984: 17).²²

Eliot and Sitwell however were not the only sources for Al Sayyab, the man who became a literary movement in himself according to the publisher's introduction to *The Rain Song* (1969). Al Sayyab and the pioneers of the free verse movement were looking inquisitively for Western sources that could feed their hunger for revolutionary language such as that used by Garcia Lorca who was another inspiration. They were looking for a source of war poetry to help them articulate the war state they were experiencing in 'non-war' times. Lorca represents the revolution for most Iraqi writers. Some of the pioneers of the free poetry movement published a poem with the title 'Garcia Lorca'. Lorca did not present an inspiration in style but an inspiration for the vision of the revolutionary poet. Al Sayyab describes the reasons why Lorca was significant to that rising Iraqi generation after WWII in a poem entitled 'Garcia Lorca' (The Rain Song 1969: 23):

His Heart is a furnace
 His fire feeds the hungry
 And the water boils in his hell:
 His flood purifies the land from the evils
 His eyeballs wave a sail from the blaze
 Collect the threads from the rain spindles,
 And his eyes are inflamed with sparks
 His green sail is like spring
 The red covered with deep²³ blood.
 Like a child's boat that ripped the book
 Filled with what is inside it, with river boats,
 Like Columbus's sail in the wasteland
 Like Destiny.²⁴

²²To a great extent political parties in Iraq allow us to get a good view of their followers' religious views. For example the communists' existential attitudes show them with liberal tendencies; the nationalists demonstrated for a long time a secular attitude as did the Ba'athists but then changed during Saddam Hussein's regime in the 1990s to a more religious one. Other parties were already established on religious principles such as the Islamic Party (which represents the Suni-muslim sector) and the Islamic Dawa [call] Party (which represents the Shi'a muslim sector).

²³The word in Arabic Najee'a has more than one meaning. It can mean blood that comes from the abdomen as well as the healing treatment or medicine.

²⁴My translation.

(Al Sayyab 'Garcia Lorca', 1969: 23-24)

Al Sayyab described Lorca as hell and heaven, war and peace, stability and straying, and concluded that he is thus their 'Destiny'. Al Sayyab used Lorca the poet himself as a symbol and not only his poetry. This could be a reference to Al Sayyab's own life experience or a prophecy of his tragic death in exile. Al Sayyab lived through these opposing states throughout his life. He experienced the heaven of freedom and the hell of opposition to his writings, the peace of his choices and the support of his generation against the war with the politicians, traditionalists and the supporters of classical Arabic poetry. Lorca can be read here as a symbol of Eliot himself, sailing 'in the wasteland', 'his eyes are inflamed with sparks' and he is one whose 'fire feeds the hungry'. Al Sayyab here uses Lorca the revolutionary to depict Eliot's influence on the literary revolution in Arabic poetry in the Iraq of the pre 1980's Iran- Iraq war.

CONCLUSIONS

Al Sayyab articulates the vision of the Arab poet in the post WWII era and the oppressive culture and tyrannical regimes that have controlled and militarized Iraq since then. What he wanted to add to his creativity is the vision of the modern devastated world and the decline of civilization. Most of his original and adopted lines reflect the agony and pain of the simple man in an artificial world. A common modernist theme that fascinated him in Eliot's and Sitwell's poems is that the world they offer in their poetry 'is unreal and artificial, having been compounded of as varied a crew of words, personalities, colors, images, histories, objects and ideas as can be conceived' (Loney 1951). The open line of dissent initiated by Al Sayyab and his generation, through the translation of Western modern literature and the intertextuality of these models, was their greatest achievement. The innovation it created in the wartime era in the 1980s was sometimes considered as being off limits and took poetry beyond the boundaries of poetic forms to emerge in a new prosaic formation.

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