

T.S. Eliot's influence and Badr Shakir Al- Sayyab's Individual Talent in "A City Without Rain"

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Abstract:

Modern Arab poets were questing for a new form of poetry which will help them do away with the rigid classical forms. Badr Shakir Al-Sayyab was among the pioneers to bring a new form of poetry to the Arabic literary tradition. He managed through imitation and translation of some western models to bring a new form of poetry which is called 'free verse' to the Arabic literary tradition. Moreover, through adopting T. S. Eliot's concept of tradition, Al-Sayyab proved his talent by adding to Eliot and contributing to the literary tradition. Thus, his contribution is evident in his poem "A City Without Rain" since he presents a variation on the theme of rain and the use of the Babylonian myth of Ishtar.

ملخص: بحث الشعراء العرب المحدثين عن شكل جديد للشعر يمكنهم من الابتعاد عن الأشكال الكلاسيكية المقيدة. إن بدر شاكر السياب من بين الرائدین الذين أدخلوا شكل شعري جديد للموروث الأدبي العربي. فقد تمكن من إدخال شكل جديد للشعر، يعرف بالشعر الحر، للموروث الأدبي العربي من خلال محاكاة و ترجمة بعض النماذج الغربية. علاوة على ذلك فقد أثبت السياب، من خلال تبنيه لمفهوم تي إس إليوت للموروث، موهبته الفردية بإضافته لإليوت و مساهمته في الموروث الأدبي. و بهذا تتجلى مساهمته بوضوح في قصيدته "مدينة بلا مطر" حيث أنه استعرض تنوع لمغزى المطر و استخدم أسطورة عشتار البابلية.

Modern Arab poets have always looked for new forms of poetry that would enable them to express themselves freely and to do away with Classical Arabic forms. In other words, they were questing for a new kind of poetry which differs from the rigid Classical Arabic forms in terms of form and content, and which meets the new demands for dealing with a variety of issues, such as the social, national and even political problems related to the spirit of their time.

Arab poets' constant quest for new forms of poetry has led them to seek some of the Western poetic forms. In this respects, S. Moreh has pointed out that the incapability of the Classical Arabic poetry to meet the demands of modern Arab poets has led them to seek new forms of poetry through

their contact with the West, that is, by imitating different forms and models of Western poetry, such as the sonnet, the ode and even prose poems (Moreh, 1976: 218). This means that through imitating some Western poetic forms and models, modern Arab poets were seeking to develop a new form of poetry which will enable them to go beyond the restrictions of Classical Arabic forms.

Imitation is considered to be an important factor in the process of development, since according to J. T. Shaw's theory of influence "imitations have often been used as a pedagogic device in an artist's development" (Shaw, 1961: 89). Accordingly, under the influence of genuine Western poets like T.S. Eliot (1888-1965), modern Arab poets as Badr Shakir Al-Sayyab (1926-1964), Abdul-Wahhab Al-Bayyati (1926-1999) and nazik Al-Mala'ika (1922-2007) have "led Arabic poetry beyond the constraints of classical Arabic forms" (Frangieh, 1990: 1). This change in Arabic poetry has taken place because of the emergence of a new form of poetry called free verse and because of the modern Arab poets' adoption of Eliot's new complicated techniques.

In his essay "Modern Arabic Literature and the West," Jabra I. Jabra (1971: 6) points out the two major factors related to the change that has overtaken the Arabic poetic form. The first one is related to Eliot's early works which were partly responsible for the "eruptive" change in Arabic poetry while the second is related to the fact that those who translated Eliot's works were the leading Arab poets of the new generation, such as al-Sayyab, Yûsuf Al-khal (1917-1987) and Buland al-Haidari (1926_____), who managed to bring a change to Arabic poetry through their "reworkings" (Weisstein, 1973) of Eliot's poetic works. This means that change in Arabic poetry is related to Eliot's influence on modern Arab poets which stems from their reworking of his early poetic works, such as "The Waste Land" (1922). This reworking has not only contributed to the development of modern Arabic poetry but also led new Arab poets to contribute to the literary tradition and to add to Eliot.

The first step that led modern Arab poets, like al-Sayyab and many others, to be influenced by Eliot is related to their translation of some of his early poems, such as "The Waste Land." In this respect, translation itself becomes a creative act; modern Arab poets managed to bring new works which are written in another language, such as "The Waste Land," into their native literary tradition. Accordingly, Shaw states that "translation is itself a creative act; the translator brings into his contemporary native literary tradition a work written in another language and often at a different time" (Shaw, 1961: 88). Moreover, translation is considered to be a creative act for it helps to bring into the native literary tradition new models which serve to be a main source of imitation. Therefore, modern Arab poets have managed to bring into their native literary tradition new models, as "The Waste Land," which then became their main sources of imitation, that is, the main sources of their

poetic development. It is worth noting in this context that the reader should not misconceive imitation since it does not mean copying. Imitations, according to Shaw's theory of influence, "have often been used as a pedagogic device in an artist's development" (Shaw, 1961: 89). One concludes that such reworking, translation and imitation of Eliot's early works have influenced modern Arab poets.

Another important factor that led new Arab poets, like al-Sayyab, to be influenced by Eliot is related to his concept of tradition. In this respect, Jabra indicates that Eliot has developed a dynamic concept of tradition. According to him, tradition is revived by the interaction between the old and the new through the individual talent (Jabra, 1971: 81). This means that the individual talent can lead the poet to contribute to the literary tradition. In this respect, modern Arab poets, through using their talent in translating and imitating some works within the literary tradition, such as "The Waste Land", have become able to add to those who have influenced them, such as Eliot. Moreover, in his essay "Tradition and the Individual Talent," Eliot demands from the poets a historical sense, that is, an awareness of the change and this is exactly what the modern Arab poets insisted that they had (Jabra, 1971: 83). Therefore, owing to their awareness of the necessity of change, modern Arab poets have attempted adopting the complicated techniques employed by Eliot in "The Waste Land," through molding them into a new form of poetry called free verse.

The use of the new poetry, free verse, has led to an "eruptive" change in the history of Arabic poetry in terms of form and content. In terms of form, modern Arab poets managed to do away with the unrhyme and unimeter scheme of the Classical Arabic forms, as the classical *qasida*, by their use of any desired number of foot within a single verse. Thus, this act has led them to the free practice of enjambment which gave the poem a great sense of unity and coherence. Loya states:

This was to be known as the "New poetry" in which the foot was the basic structural unit of the poem which the poet was free to use in any desired number within a single verse, thus making it possible for a couplet to be composed of one foot or even part of a foot. Enjambment was therefore freely practiced, giving the poem a great measure of unity and coherence. (Loya, 1971: 198).

Through the free use of foot within a single verse and through the use of enjambment, modern Arab poets managed to break away from the rigid unrhyme scheme of the Classical Arabic forms. Consequently, the change in form has led to a change in content because through doing away with the rigid unrhyme scheme, modern Arab poets managed to express themselves freely. In the new form of

poetry, free verse has proved its capability of meeting their new demands in dealing with new issues, such as those related to social, national or even political problems in their time. Therefore, the free verse has caused a revolution in the development of Arabic poetry in terms of form and content. Furthermore, it has become the only form for the modern Arab poets through which they can adopt new techniques, especially those employed in Eliot's "The Waste Land" (Moreh, 1976: 216).

Modern Arab poets like al-Sayyab were fascinated with Eliot's experimentation with new techniques in his poem "The Waste Land." Among these techniques were "the objective correlative," allusions and the mythical method. Through the objective correlative technique, Eliot uses a set of fragmented extended images which seem to be unrelated but their implications are contrived by him to converge into a coherent whole (Loya 1971: 196). The reader can accordingly grasp the wholeness and coherence of these images through making a mental correlation among them. For example, in "What the Thunder Said" section in "The Waste Land," Eliot uses this technique in order to convey the state of sterility and barrenness in the land which results from the delay of rain. Another important technique, employed by Eliot in "The Waste Land," is allusion. Through the use of allusion, Eliot managed to reinforce the theme in a precise and concise manner. He has derived allusions from different sources of material, such as myths, history and Christian tradition.

As regards to this point, the reader has to make an analogy between the allusion and the theme in order to grasp the intention of the poet. Furthermore, Eliot has used another technique that attracted the attention of most of the modern Arab poets which is the mythical method. He refers to fertility myths of death and resurrection that imply the death and rebirth of the land and he attributes many symbols to this myth, such as the symbol of rain. Owing to this, modern Arab poets have adopted the myth in their poems in order to express their vision of future rebirth of the Arab nation after a long state of barrenness. Consequently, Eliot's employment to all these techniques in "The Waste Land" has led many modern Arab poets as al-Sayyab to adopt them in their poems. In this context, it is convenient to show how al-Sayyab managed to adopt these techniques in his poem "A City Without Rain" (1958).

Abdul-Ridha Ali indicates in his essay "Myth in al-Sayyab's poetry" that in "A City Without Rain," al-Sayyab tends to depict the drought which hit Iraq before the revolution (Ali, 1988: 70). This theme has been conveyed to the reader through al-Sayyab's use of the objective correlative technique. In other words, al-Sayyab has used a set of images that seem to be unrelated but they tend all to build up a framework of his intention in the mind of the reader. In this respect, Issa J. Boullata points out that the use of successive number of images becomes a quality that runs through all his poetry, accordingly he states:

Yet if there is any single quality that runs through almost all his poetry, it is his reliance on images to convey this thought or emotion. Image after image builds up in the receiver's mind a framework for the poet's intention in the majority of al-Sayyab's poems. (Boullata, 1980: 234)

As far as "A City Without Rain" is concerned, al-Sayyab managed to depict some images which help to reinforce the drought in the city of Babylon. For example, the first image in the poem suggests the state of darkness in the city stemming from the overwhelming existence of clouds which are not saturated with rain:

مدینتنا تورق لیلها نار بلا لھب
تحم درویھا والدور، ثم تزول حماھا
ویصبغھا الغروب بكل ما حملت
من سحب (السیاب 1989: 486)

The image of the clouds that are not saturated with rain helps to reinforce the state of barrenness. Al-Sayyab then, in another image, continues by saying that these clouds are only packed with thunder and thunderbolts:

سحائب مرعدات مبرقات دون أمطار
قضینا العام، بعد العام، بعد العام، نرعاھا
ولا هدأت - ننام ونستقیق ونحن نخشاھا (487)

The thunder in the above image also suggests the state of drought in the city. In addition to this image, al-Sayyab makes reference to the wilted palm trees:

ولكن مرت الأعوام كثرا حسیناھا
بلا مطر... ولو قطرة
ولا زهرة... ولو زهرة
بلا ثمر- كأن تخیلنا الجرداء انصاب اقمناھا
لنذبل ونموت تحتھا (488)

This image also helps to emphasize the state of barrenness in the city since through portraying the wilted palm trees and state of people who are dead-in-life, al-Sayyab intends to reinforce the theme of drought in the city. Therefore, the reader through making a mental correlation among these previous images concludes that the state of barrenness in the city stems from the delay of rain (symbol of fertility).

Al-Sayyab through the employment of the objective correlative technique tries to reflect his hope for the resurrection of the city of Babylon by portraying contrastive images of barrenness and

fertility. For example, the image of the Iraqi children, who suffer from fear and hunger, pleading Ishtar (a Babylonian fertility goddess) to bring them rain, is followed by the fall drops:

جياغ نحن مرتجفون في الظلمة
ونبحث عن يد في الليل تطعمنا، تغطينا،
نشد عيوننا عنك في الظلماء، عن ثديين، عن حلمة
فيا من صدرها الأفق الكبير وتديها الغيمة
سمعت نشيجنا ورأيت كيف نموت... فاسقينا! (490)

This image suggests the state of barrenness in Iraq for the Iraqi children are hungry and thirsty. As a result, they pleaded Ishtar to bring them rain. Al-Sayyab immediately coupled this image of barrenness with an image of fertility to suggest that there is a sense of hope and the city is going to be resurrected someday in the future

ولكن خفقة الأقدام والأيدي
على
وكركرة و "آه" صغيرة قبضت بيدها
قمر يرفرف كالفراشة، أو على نجمة
على رعشات ماء، قطرة همست بها نسمة
لنعلم أن
بابل سوف تغسل من خطاياها (491).

In the last verse of the above image al-Sayyab conveys a sense of hope which associated with the future rebirth of the nation. So, through depicting all these successive images al-Sayyab tends to reflect his hope for the resurrection and rebirth of the nation after a long state of barrenness and drought. He has reinforced this theme through his employment of fertility myth of death and resurrection and through deriving symbols which stand for the attributes of this myth.

In "A City Without Rain," al-Sayyab uses the myth of Tammuz, the fertility god which suggests the rebirth and resurrection of the city of Babylon, the representation of Arab cities that suffer from oppression:

صحا من نومه الطيني تحت عرائش العنب
صحا تموز، عاد لبابل الخضراء يرعاها (486).

In this image Tammuz awakes from his tomb and goes to Babylon in order to take care of it. This implies that Tammuz is going to resurrect the land through his seasonal rebirth. The myth of Tammuz here serves al-Sayyab's hopeful vision that nation is going to be revived by the savior (Tammuz or Christ). Thus Tammuz symbolizes the revolutionary figure that is going to deliver Ishtar (the equivalent of the nation) from the state of misery. By this, al-Sayyab identifies the reality with the myth and vice versa (El-Azma, 1980: 225). Tammuz (the savior); therefore, is going to deliver

Ishtar in the same way the revolution is going to free Iraq from the political oppression. So al-Sayyab uses the fertility myth of Tammuz in order to portray the dilemma in Iraq during the fifties. Accordingly, the reader notices the kind of analogy between al-Sayyab and Eliot since both of them have employed the myth to deal with a problem related to the spirit of their age. In this respect Abdul-Jabbar Abbas states:

ولكن يمكن القول أن الاسباب التي دعت السياب إلى تبني الأسطورة شبيهة بالأسباب التي دعت اليوت إلى تبنيها في شعره، فبدر يلتقي مع شعراء جيله في الاستعانة بالأسطورة لتفسير أزمة الإنسان الحديث وإعادة تقييم التجربة الإنسانية على ضوء حاضر مثقل بالمشكلات الحضارية. (عباس، 1971: 188)

[One can say that the reasons underlying al-Sayyab's adoption of the myth are closely related to these underlying Eliot's adoption to it in his poetry, since Badr like many poets of his generation tends to use the myth in order to reflect a crisis related to the spirit of his time.]

In "A City Without Rain," the reader notices that al-Sayyab has derived symbols from Tammuz's fertility myth such as the symbol of rain as well as allusions to Jesus Christ. These two symbols are the attributes of the myth. The rain in the poem stands for fertility, hope, and happiness. It is a symbol of fertility and life according to al-Sayyab because this is its original role in ancient vegetation cults (Deyoung, 1993: 42). For example, the image of Tammuz who comes with rain every year suggests that rain is a symbol of fertility and life:

ومنقذه الذي في عام من هناك يعود بالأزهار
والأمطار – ترحنا يدا لنستفيق على أياديه؟ (488)

The theme of rain is conveyed as a symbol of rebirth and fertility. In this respect, the reader can notice that Eliot in "The waste Land," has tackled the same theme, in the section of "What the Thunder Said" Eliot says:

In a flash of lightning. Then a damp gust
Bringing rain (Eliot, 1973: 78).

In this image the theme of rain also suggests rebirth and fertility. Accordingly, the reader gets the impression that Eliot's influence on al-Sayyab was not only stylistic, that is, in terms of techniques, but also thematic. However, al-Sayyab has added to Eliot by presenting a variation on the theme of rain. Thus, the theme of rain does not only symbolize fertility in al-Sayyab's poem but also it becomes as a symbol of happiness and triumph. Al-Sayyab reinforces this point through portraying the laughs of children:

على
 وكركرة و"آه" صغيرة قبضت بيمناه
 على هبة من الغيمة،
 قمر يرفرف كالفراشة، أو على نجمة
 على رعشات ماء، ما قطرة همست بها نسمة. (491)

The children are happy because rain for them suggests joy. Furthermore, rain also is associated with hope since it is linked with al-Sayyab's vision of future rebirth and freedom from all political oppression:

لنعلم أن بابل تغسل من خطاياها. (491)

Jesus Christ is the other symbol used by al-Sayyab as an attribute for the fertility myth. Al-Sayyab says:

سيدنا جفانا. آه يا قبره
 أما في قاعك الطيني من جرة؟
 فيها بقايا من دم الرب أو بذرة. (489)

In the above image, al-Sayyab associates Christ with Tammuz. Both of them stand for the resurrection and rebirth of the land. So, al-Sayyab tends to fuse the symbol of Christ with the fertility myth of Tammuz. By doing so, he managed to give his poetry a universal touch. As regards to this, Shihab Ahmed in his essay "Al-Sayyab and Christ" states:

Al-Sayyab has his own reason to allude to Christ and some Christian rites in his poetry. He tries to appeal to the collective unconscious of his readers, and aim to give his poetry a universal touch by going beyond his individual belief, to a doctrine outside his locale. Moreover, he intends to fuse Christian tradition with his doctrine outside his locale. Moreover, he intends to fuse Christian tradition with his own, namely, the myth of Tammuz (the seed bed of fertility, rebirth, immortality and cyclic movement seasons). (Ahmed, 1987: 75)

Moreover, al-Sayyab in the above image tends to show that the figure of Christ stands for the savior who is going to resurrect the land through his blood. In the same way Tammuz is portrayed to be a savior, like Christ, since his seasonal awakening is going to resurrect the land. The only major distinction between Jesus Christ and Tammuz is that Tammuz resurrection tends to be seasonal while Christ resurrection is not. The idea here lies in the fact that the seasonal resurrection of Tammuz is linked with the barrenness of the nation and the urgency of its awakening. In this respect, Ihsan Abbas states:

تصوير التفاؤل القريب
 ضرورة يقظتها وليس كذلك المسيح
 أن انبعاث تموز يتجدد مع حركة الفصول فهو أقدر على
 حين يكون الحديث متصلاً بظلمات الشعوب
 (عباس، 1983: 306)

[The seasonal resurrection of Tammuz tends to be more capable to portray the sense of hope, which is linked with the urgency of the nation's awakening after a state of barrenness than of Christ]

The reader grasps that the symbol of Christ is one of the attributes of the fertility myth since it suggests rebirth and resurrection. So far, the reader concludes that T.S. Eliot's influence on al-Sayyab is stylistic and thematic. It is stylistic because al-Sayyab has adopted some of the complicated techniques, such as the objective correlative, allusions and the mythical method. Furthermore, it is thematic because al-Sayyab has derived from "The Waste Land," the theme of rain which suggests rebirth and fertility and then employed it in his poem. In this context, al-Sayyab managed to add to Eliot through presenting a variation on the theme of rain. He not only deals with this theme as a symbol of fertility, but also he deals with it as a symbol of happiness and triumph. Thus, by presenting a variation on the theme of rain, al-Sayyab manages to add to Eliot and to contribute to the literary tradition.

Moreover, al-Sayyab's major achievement in "A City Without Rain," lies in his dealing with the political oppression in Iraq. Accordingly, Abbas states:

ويستعير الشاعر أكثر الصور الوثنية التي تهيئها قصة تموز وعشتار - ببراءة فذه - استغلال تلك الصور في سياق متدرج، دون أن يخرج من الجو الوثني، ودون أن يختل الرمز بين الظهور والاستئناس إلا مرة واحدة حين يخاطب العباد الأرباب بأن عيونهم "حجارة تنداح في العتمة"، فمثل هذا القول لا يوجهه الضارعون إلى أربابهم، ولكن طغت الفكرة السياسية على الشاعر فانتقل الرمز عفوياً إلى السطح ولم يعد كامناً وراء الصور الخارجية.
 (عباس، 1983: 310)

[The poet portrays the pagan fertility of Tammuz and Ishtar skillfully. He represents it in gradual process through the use of some images without doing away with the pagan framework and without confusing the symbol between being explicit or implicit except only one time in the poem. This is when the people said to the leaders that their eyes are like rocks, such saying is not conveyed by the Iraqi people but it is expressed by the poet to reflect the overwhelming political idea in the poem and by this the political dimension become explicit].

This means that the leaders in Iraq were totally responsible for the political oppression and also they are responsible for the hunger attributed to Iraqi children. This is because of the tendency on the part of the leaders to ignore the conditions of the citizens. Accordingly, al-Sayyab says:

فيا أربابنا المتطلعين بغير ما رحمه
 عيونكم الحجار تحسها تنداح في القمة
 لترجمنا بلا نقمة،
 تدور كأنهن رحي بطيئات تلوك
 جفوننا حتى ألقاها. (487)

This image is portrayed by al-Sayyab and through it he expresses the major political idea in the poem. In this respect, Ahmed Al-Shkayrat indicates that he integrates his hunger for everything with the Iraqi people's hunger which results from the tyranny of the leaders who don't show any sympathy for Iraqi people (Al-Shkayrat, 1987: 124). Moreover, al-Sayyab emphasizes the political idea of the poem through describing the leaders who don't fulfill their promises for the public:

سرقنا من بيوت النمل ما من اجرانها دخناً وشوفاناً

وأوشابا زرنا

فوفينا- وما وفى لنا- نذره! (489)

So far, al-Sayyab's interest in reflecting the political idea in his poem suggests a point of departure from Eliot. For in "The Waste Land," Eliot doesn't deal with political issues. Thus al-Sayyab, as many other Arab poets, contributed to the literary tradition by dealing with the political idea in his poem. Furthermore, al-Sayyab's achievement lies in presenting a variation on the theme of rain employed by Eliot in "The Waste Land," He doesn't it, only deal with this theme as a symbol of fertility but also he represents other variations on this theme, such as happiness and triumph.

Furthermore, al-Sayyab has contributed to the literary tradition through deriving a myth from ancient Babylon (the myth of Tammuz and Ishtar), that is he didn't rely on Greek myth in his poem, instead he derives the myth from his own culture. Thus, he did only confine himself to alluding to Christian tradition but he instead derives myths from the ancient Babylonian tradition and by that he has departed from those poets who allude to ancient Greek myths. Accordingly, he added to Eliot by deriving myths from his own Iraqi culture and consequently he contributed to the literary tradition.

Al Sayyab in "A City Without Rain," managed to follow many steps. These steps range from his translation and many other poets' translations of Eliot's early works then to imitation and after this to the adoption of Eliot's techniques. Through translation modern Arab poets brought new models to their literary tradition. One of these models was "The Waste Land," which is considered to be the cause for the eruptive change overtaken on Arabic poetry. It becomes the major source of influence

on many modern poets like al-Sayyab. As a result, modern Arab poets, especially al-Sayyab, embarked on their imitation of this model, "The Waste Land." These imitations led them to adopt some of Eliot's techniques, such as those adopted by al-Sayyab in "A City Without Rain." Accordingly, Eliot's influence on al-Sayyab was through employing the adopted techniques in his poem. This influence has led him to produce his own original work through which he adds to Eliot and consequently contributed to the literary tradition.

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