ROMANTICISM AND SYMBOLISM IN
THE POETRY OF BADR SHAKIR AS-SAYYAB

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ABSTRACT

The object of this research was to discover to what extent Badr Shākir as-Sayyāb was a Romantic, the exact nature of his Romanticism, and the part played by Symbolism in his verse. As-Sayyāb's literary career is normally divided into the Romantic, the Committed or Symbolic, and finally the Subjective which is often seen as a return to his early Romantic tendencies.

It has however become clear in the course of this study that as-Sayyāb was a Romantic from his earliest verse, and remained one throughout his life. But his Romanticism was not restricted to the negative genre of Arabic verse of the 1930s and 1940s (Chapter I), but extended beyond into the realms of more genuine Romantic theories, which make the individual's expression of emotion and convictions the mainstay of literature and art generally.

Thus as-Sayyāb's Romanticism can be divided into three major phases (Chapter III):

1) The imitative: in which he tended to copy the poetry of older poets, notably Tāhā and Abū Shabaka (Chapter II). This stage would extend into Asātīr (but could not be applied to the whole diwān) and cover his Bawākīr and Azhār Dḥābila.

2) The personal humanistic: which would cover part of Asātīr, and extend into Unshudat al-Māṭar and linger slightly in later volumes. In this phase he wrote according to personal convictions and attitudes which were both political and humanistic. Under the influence of Eliot and Sitwell (amongst others) he employed myth symbolically to communicate his patriotism and feelings for mankind obliquely, while
also using leitmotif and associative diction. He thus differed from poets like 'Aql, Labaki and Fāris (Pre-Symbolists: Chapter IV) because he borrowed many Symbolist devices but employed them within a Romantic framework, and should perhaps be called a "Symbolist Romantic" (Chapter V).

iii) The subjective: which would cover poems like "an-Nahr wa-l-Mawt" in Unshūdat al-Māṭar and subsequent poems written before his death. In this stage he continued to use the style which he had manipulated so masterfully in Unshūdat al-Māṭar, but tended towards more subjective themes, although he remained committed to his country and mankind. These poems are not however introspective, and are a positive expression of his struggle against ill-health, and are part of man's archetypal fight against despair and death.

Thus as-Sayyāb always relied on his personal expression of ideas and emotions in his verse, and shunned artificiality and escapism from the time of Asūr, and was undoubtedly one of the great masters of Romantic verse.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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iv
The system of transliteration adopted in this thesis is that of the Department of Islamic Studies of the University of Edinburgh. As regards the translation of poetic quotations, only those with the least immediate influence on as-Sayyāb have been translated. Thus the poems quoted in Chapters I and IV have generally been translated into English, while any quotations from the poetry of Tāhā, Abū Shabaka, Nāji or as-Sayyāb have normally been left in the original Arabic.
ABBREVIATIONS

′Abdās, Ihsān, as-Sayyāb
Badr Shākir as-Sayyāb: Dirāsa fī Ḥayātih wa-Shiʿrih

Abdul-Hai, M., Thesis
Traditional and English and American Influence in Arabic Romantic Poetry (unpubl Ph.D. Thesis)

′Abtā
′Abtā, Maḥmūd, Badr Shākir as-Sayyāb wa-l-Ḥarakah sh-Shiʿriyya 1-Jadīda fī l-ʿIrāq

Abū Shabaka, Rawābiṭ al-Fikr
Rawābiṭ al-Fikr wa-r-Rūh bayn al-ʿArab wa-l-Fīrānīa

′Afāʾīl Firdaws
Abū Shabaka, ′Afāʾīl Firdaws

Aḥmad, ar-Ramz wa-r-Ramziyya
Aḥmad, M. Futūḥ, ar-Ramz wa-r-Ramziyya fī sh-Shiʿr al-Muʿāṣir

Ajmalu minkī? Lā!
′Aql, Saʿīd, Ajmalu minkī? Lā!

al-Alḥān
Abū Shabaka, al-Alḥān

′Alwān, Taṭawwur
Taṭawwur ash-Shiʿr fī l-ʿIrāq
Anthology
Khouri and Algar, An Anthology of Modern Arabic Poetry

Asāfīr
as-Sayyāb, Asāfīr (Najaf, 1950)

Badawi, Anthology
Badawi, M. M., An Anthology of Modern Arabic Verse

al-Baṣrī
al-Baṣrī, ‘Abd al-Jabbār Dā'ūd, Baḍr Shākir as-Sayyāb: Rā'īd ash-Shi‘r al-Hurr

Boullata

Dhikrāh as-Sādisa
as-Sayyāb ff Dhikrāh as-Sādisa (Baghdad, 1971)

Dirāsāt
Dāyf, Shawqī, Dirāsāt ff sh-Shi‘r al-‘Arabī l-Mu‘āṣir

Dīwān, 1; and Dīwān, 2

Dīwān N.
Dīwān Nājī (Cairo, 1961)

Dīwān T.
Dīwān ‘Alī Maḥmūd Tāhā (Beirut, 1972)
Fahmi, Tatawwur ash-Shi’r
Fahmi, Mahir Hasan, Tatawwur ash-Shi’r al-'Arabi l-Hadith
fi Mihr

Fawq al-'Ubab
Abu Shadi, Fawq al-'Ubab

Ghalwa'
Abu Shabaka, Ghalwa'

Ghurayb
Ghurayb, Jurj, Ilyas Abu Shabaka: Dirasat wa-Dhikrayat

Gibb
Gibb, H. A. R., Arabic Literature

al-Hamdani
al-Hamdani, Saliim Ahmad, "Kalamih an-Naza'a l-'Atifiyya fi
Shi’r Ibrahim Naji", Adab ar-Rafidayn (Aug., 1977)

Il6 1-Abad
Abu Shabaka, Il6 1-Abad

'Izzat
'Izzat, 'Ali, al-Lugha wa-d-Dalala fi sh-Shi’r

Jayyusi, Trends and Movements
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Poetry (2 vols., continuous pagination)

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Karam, Antun Ghaftas, ar-Ramziyya wa-l-Adab al-'Arabi l-Hadith
Khadduri
Khadduri, Majid, Independent Iraq: A Study in Iraqi Politics since 1932

Kirrū
Kirrū, Abū 1-Qāsim M., Āthār ash-Shāḥbū wa-Sadāhu fī sh-Shayr

Labakī
Labakī, Ṣalāḥ, Lubnān ash-Shā‘ir

al-Majdaliyya
‘Aql, Sa‘īd, al-Majdaliyya

al-Malā‘ika, ‘Alī Maḥmūd Tāhā
al-Malā‘ika, Nāzik, Shi‘r ‘Alī Maḥmūd Tāhā; Dirāsa wa-Naqd

M. A. P.
Badawi, M. M., A Critical Introduction to Modern Arabic Poetry

M. A. Poetry
Moreh, S., Modern Arabic Poetry (1800-1970)

Mawā‘īd
Labakī, Ṣalāḥ, Mawā‘īd

Nidā‘ al-Qalb
Abū Shabaka, Nidā‘ al-Qalb

Nijland, Mikhā‘il Nu‘aymah
Nijland, C., Mikhā‘il Nu‘aymah: Promoter of the Arabic Literary Revival
Ostle, Khalil Mutran


Ostle, Studies

Ostle (ed.), Studies in Modern Arabic Literature

ar-Ramadhi, Mutran

ar-Ramadhi, Jamal ad-Din, Khalil Mutran: Shafir al-Aqtar al-'Arabiyya

Rasail

as-Samarrati, Mujid (ed.), Rasail as-Sayyab

Razzuq

Razzuq, Razzuq Faraj, Ilyas Abu Shabaka wa-Shi'ruh

Risalat al-Hayat

Najj, Ibrahim, Risalat al-Hayat

ar-Rumantiqiyya

Boullata (spelt Bullata), ar-Rumantiqiyya wa-Maf'alimuha fi ash-Shi'r al-'Arabi l-Hadith

ash-Shu'la

Abu Shadi, ash-Shu'la

at-Ta'bir ash-Shi'ri

Mandur, Muhammad, "at-Ta'bir ash-Shi'ri bayn as-Suqiyya wa-r-Rasiziyya", al-Majalla (Aug., 1958)
al-Uṣūra

‘Alī, ‘Abd ar-Riḍā, al-Uṣūra fī Shi‘r as-Sayyāb

Wasā‘īl


al-Yanbu‘

Abū Shādi, al-Yanbu‘

ASSOCIATED BIBLIOGRAPHICAL ABBREVIATIONS

Eliot

Eliot, T. S., The Complete Poems and Plays

Handbook to Literature

Holman, C. Hugh, Handbook to Literature

Pears Encyclopaedia

Pears Encyclopaedia of Myths and Legends: Ancient Near and Middle East, Ancient Greece and Rome
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Abū Shabaka

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Ibrahim Naji and as-Sayyab

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INTRODUCTION

The Life of Badr Shākir as-Sayyāb

During the year 1926 in a small village of about five hundred people twenty-three kilometres to the south of Basra a son was born into the family of as-Sayyāb, who was to become one of the greatest poets of his generation. His father, overjoyed at the birth of his first son, wrote down the date so as to have an accurate record of the happy event; however the paper was soon mislaid and the date of Badr Shākir as-Sayyāb's birth remains unknown to us.

The village of Jaykūr is typical of the villages in this date-producing region, composed of one-storeyed houses built of unbaked mud-brick and palm tree trunks, whose bare, windowless walls face the road which winds through the palm groves to the town of Abū 1-Khaṣīf, three kilometres away. As-Sayyāb's father made his living in Jaykūr, cultivating the date palms as his family had done for generations, although he supplemented his income by supervising the neighbouring estates for a small fee from time to time. In this atmosphere as-Sayyāb grew up, and it was the childhood memories formed here that were to colour and haunt his poetry throughout his life, such as the old deserted house built by one of his ancestors, called Ḳūt al-Marāqīqa, where the children used to play which became Manzil al-Aqūnān (The House of Slaves). Indeed when Nājī 'Allūsh recalls the last pathetic days of as-Sayyāb's life, while he was in hospital in Kuwait, he talks of learning many things about "Jaykūr, Buwayb [one of the creeks running through Jaykūr] and Abū 1-Khaṣīf, and about his father, his
mother, his step-mother, the house of his grandfather and the palms" and also how as-Sayyāb's grandfather used to tell the children stories about 'Antara, The Conquest of Syria and other such tales, some of which turned up in as-Sayyāb's later poem "Iram dhāt al-'Imād":

And our grandfather said, continuing in sobs:
"And I shall never see it now, for my life draws to an end
And time cannot recall what is passed.
I shall see it through you, for you are the fragrance
After the wilting of my bloom. So, if one of you
Should see Iram, knock on the door and do not sleep!
Iram . . .
There is pain in my mind from remembering it,
The dream of my lost childhood . . . Ah, lost when it was complete,
For my life draws to an end."

However when the time came for as-Sayyāb to go to school he had to travel to Bāb Sulaymān, a village to the west of Jaykūr as there was no school in his own village at that time. Then, after completing the fourth grade there, he moved to the Maḥmūdiyya Elementary School for Boys at Abū l-Khaṣīb, where English was added to his studies. It was during his time at the latter school that he began to write poetry in the classical style as opposed to the colloquial poems he had previously been composing, showing them to the imām and to his

3. Diwān, 2, p. 22.
teachers whose praise encouraged him to progress to patriotic themes. Later, when talking about these poems as-Sayyāb said that although they were metrically correct they were full of grammatical errors.

In 1935 a great upheaval took place in the as-Sayyāb household when his father decided to remarry, as-Sayyāb's mother having died three years previously, and, having been virtually ostracised by his family, moved to his new wife's village and away from his children. This and the death of his mother had a lasting effect upon as-Sayyāb, making him turn first to his maternal grandmother, with whom he lived when he moved to the Basra Secondary School for Boys in autumn 1938, and later to a succession of idealized relationships with various women.

By 1941 as-Sayyāb had started to write poetry regularly, returning many times to his compositions, changing words and even complete sections in an attempt to improve them. These poems show a strong romantic influence and centre around descriptions of nature, his village and rustic life generally. All of these elements combine in one particular poem, "Dhikrayat ar-Rif", in which he describes:

Those radiant fields through which a small stream of water flows, between lassitude and passion,

[And] over it a bridge of palm tree trunks creaks and complains beneath the feet of whoever crosses.¹

Even at this early stage in his life one of the dominant features of as-Sayyāb's poetry is easily discernible, namely his talent for vivid and strikingly descriptive poetry. Although the more personal style

¹. Dīwān, 2, p. 119.
of his later poetry renders his later works more immediately impressive, the way the young as-Sayyāb treats his pastoral descriptions is seldom merely imitative:

The luxuriant fronds droop and their shadows lie down on the bank, thirsty for water,
While the leaves of the mulberry tree descend, sinking to the depths of what lies between the plants and pebbles.¹

His poetry also expresses his feelings in a simple, and usually romantic vein, such as his admiration for his cousin Waffqa, and his deep sorrow when his dreams about her were shattered by her marriage:

Oh goddess of my inspiration
And glorification of my days,
You have my heart, now finished with childhood,
So return some of my dreams.²

By this time the young poet was developing an awareness of the politics of his country, and the influence of world politics upon it. In 1942 he wrote "Shuhādā‘ al-Ḥurriyya"³ in which he elegizes Yūnūs as-Sab‘āwī, Fahmi Sa‘īd and Mahmūd Salmān, who had been executed for taking part in the unconstitutional cabinet of Rashīd ‘Ālī (April–May 1941).⁴ In this poem the young as-Sayyāb's nationalistic fervour is

1. Dilwān, 2, p. 282. For later descriptive power see "Layla fī Lūndūn", 1, p. 168.
3. Ibid., p. 108.
exhibited and one can already find the seeds of the attitude that led him to join the Communist Party. Because of his anger at the British presence in Iraq, as-Sayyāb, like so many Iraqis, failed or refused to recognise the true nature of the conflict in Europe and saw Germany as the upholder of national aspirations in the Middle East, and warned Britain that "in Berlin a lion watches over them". Perhaps events in Europe taught as-Sayyāb that Germany was not simply the enemy of Britain and thus the friend of all her enemies, for he remained aloof from the arguments that used to take place in the cafes he frequented in Baghdad about the British and Germany, and left when they became too heated. The nature of the education in secondary schools in Iraq at that time could well have contributed to this rather naïve reaction as it was "terribly abstract and academic and very much divorced from practical life."

The death of his grandmother in 1942 was another severe blow for as-Sayyāb as it deprived him of his one refuge since the death of his mother. The next year he graduated from school in Basra and applied to the Higher Teachers Training College in Baghdad, where he registered in the Arabic language section in the autumn of 1943. His choice may seem surprising as he had chosen the science stream in his post‐intermediate studies at secondary school; however he had also been involved with a group of students who shared his literary interests during this time, and who used to meet regularly to discuss them.

As‐Sayyāb found Baghdad very different to Basra and, in spite of the fact that a friend of his was already living there, he felt

1. Diwān, 2, p. 111.
lonely and alien. But he soon started to visit the cafe of Ibrāhīm ‘Arab in the Karantīna district, and was eventually introduced into a small literary circle. One member of this circle, Maḥmūd al-‘Abta, describing the effect as-Sayyāb had on this group when he recited some of his poetry for the first time, said, "He started reciting poems of different types in a moving manner, and as he got emotionally involved in the atmosphere of his poetry, he made strange gestures that expressed the feelings of his heart." He was also encouraged at the az-Zahwā Cafè where he met Nājī l-‘Ubaydi, who owned the al-Ittihad newspaper, and who was the first to publish any of as-Sayyāb’s poetry. Sometimes he went to the Wāq Wāq Cafè where he met with a group called "Jamā‘at al-Waq ad-Dā‘ī" (The Lost Time Group) which had been established by Buland al-‘aydarf.

He also began to encounter many attractive girls at college but custom did not permit him to approach them. However there was one girl, some seven years older than himself, called Labība, for whom he felt a particular attraction, and to whom he dedicated "Khayāluki" sub-titling it "to Labība of the red scarf". It is interesting that the poem is addressed to her reflection and not to Labība herself, and also that Labība was about the same age as as-Sayyāb’s mother had been at the time of her death. Such a relationship was doomed to failure by its very nature, and when it did it added to his sense of bitterness and frustration.

Meanwhile his studies progressed and at the end of the academic year 1943-4 his average mark was 82, his best subjects being Arabic

2. Boullata, p. 25.
3. Dīwān, 2, p. 149.
language and literature, while English language, although not poor (79\%), was the lowest. In spite of this he began to contemplate changing to the English language stream in the next academic year, partly because he felt that he had exhausted the store of knowledge to be gained in the Arabic section, and partly because it would afford him greater security in the future while broadening his knowledge of literature generally. However he remained in the Arabic section for a further year, improving his average to 91\% (1944-5), while reading as much of the works of Shakespeare, Wordsworth, Byron, Shelley and Keats as he possibly could, as well as reading *al-Adīb* (Beirut) regularly. Through his reading of English literature he also became acquainted with and began to admire the works of T. S. Eliot, which were to influence his poetry for many years to come.

Yet his pre-occupation with reading avidly did not blind him to political events both in Iraq and abroad, and, when Paul Robeson headed a deputation to meet President Truman (1946), protesting against the treatment of American negroes, as-Sayyāb wrote a poem in sympathy, advising the singer to sing of injustice not love. He also took advantage of the wealth of Marxist literature which was readily available in Baghdad at that time, and which was anti-Western and "committed".

All this time as-Sayyāb had been writing poetry, and in autumn 1947 he gave some of them to ‘Abd al-Ḥamīd as-Samīr and Madhkūr al-Asādī, who were travelling to Egypt, asking them to have them published there. The collection reached Baghdad in the second half of December 1947, with a preface by Rūfā’īl Buṭṭīfī, under the title *Āzhār Dhābila* (Withered Blooms).

Embarking on his final year at the Teachers Training College in Baghdad as-Sayyāb became acquainted with a girl called Lamī‘a, a Sabaean girl from al-‘Imāra, who was a second year student in the Arabic section. They soon became close friends especially through their mutual interest in literature; in fact she too was a poetess and when they both entered for a contest at the college Lamī‘a won first prize, while as-Sayyāb and his friend, Sulaymān al-‘Isā, came second. However Lamī‘a was extremely cautious and for this reason his poems addressed to her are inclined to be somewhat vague. Lamī‘a felt that there were many factors which would contribute to the failure of any marriage between herself and as-Sayyāb, especially the difference in religion in a traditional society such as theirs; this was one of the incentives that prompted as-Sayyāb to attack religions as

Legends [fashioned] from the death-rattles of time,
The weaving of withered hands
Which Darkness relates out of the abyss
In which the fallen sing.  

She also feared that she had come too late in his life for him to have the innocence of first love, a fear which no coaxing from as-Sayyāb could allay:

And when Day smiles out of joy the features of Eternity frown!
Before our commitment my life was but years, crawling in a body.

After he graduated in 1948 he invited her to Jaykūr and kissed her for the first and last time, then in December he visited her in Baghdad, but was disappointed and bitter at her apparent indifference, after which the affair faded out, although its shadow remained in his heart.

Having graduated as-Sayyāb now had to find a position. In October 1948 he was appointed to the ar-Namādī Secondary School at a salary of I.D. 18 per month. But he had only been there for a short time when Nūrī as-Sa‘īd became Premier and continued his moves against the communists, and as-Sayyāb, being a member of the Iraqi Communist Party, was arrested and transported to Baghdad central prison and dismissed from his post. He returned to Jaykūr and looked for a job in Basra, working as a date tester for the Iraqi Dates Company and then as a clerk for the Basra Petroleum Company. These circumstances were intolerable for as-Sayyāb so he left Basra for Baghdad to look for better employment; however he found himself faced with a period of unemployment instead. He worked temporarily as a storekeeper for a construction firm only to start moving from one daily paid job to another thereafter. But he was not without friends and 'Alī al-Khāqānī offered to publish his most recent poems, which were published under the title Asāṭīr (Legends) in Najaf in September 1950. His leftist and communist friends also helped him. Al-Jawāhīrī employed him on his newspaper, ath-Thābit, as editor and translator.

but he moved to other papers such as *al-Jabha ash-Shaṭbiyya* and *al-ʿĀlam al-ʿArabī*. The incomes from these sources were naturally precarious, especially as the publication of newspapers was often suspended. Then, in August 1951, he was finally appointed as a clerk at the Directorate of Imports and Exports with a salary of I.D. 15 per month.

After the insurrection of 1952 which brought Nūr ad-Dīn Māhmūd to power many of as-Sayyāb's friends were arrested and as-Sayyāb fled, dressed as an Arab, first to Jaykūr, then to Abadan and finally to Kuwait, where he remained for about one year, trying to save enough money to return to Iraq. In Kuwait he failed to find any kindred spirit and felt lost and detached from life in Iraq.¹

On his return to Iraq he stayed for a short time with his family before returning to Baghdad, where he suffered from a severe lack of cash. His situation was improved, briefly, when he worked for *ad-Difāʿ*, owned by Ṣādiq al-Bāṣṣām, until on December 23rd, 1953 he was re-appointed as a clerk at the Directorate of Imports and Exports. Now that his economic circumstances had improved as-Sayyāb rented a modest flat and asked his aunt to come to Baghdad from Basra to keep house for him.

After he came back from Basra as-Sayyāb spent most of his free time in one or other of the Baghdad cafes, never losing his sense of humour even when times were hard, and often reciting his latest poems to his acquaintances. Buland al-Ḥaydārī was always particularly welcome and the two men would often walk together along the banks of the Tigris.

But his private life was still beset by problems. Wafīqa died in her early thirties and her death upset as-Sayyāb a great deal. The Communist Party no longer appreciated him because his works seemed to be moving away from their methods, and because they had begun to consider ‘Abd al-Wahhāb al-Bayātī as their spokesman. As-Sayyāb's attitude was indeed changing, and his new vision "tried to embrace the whole nascent Arab nation and, through it, all humanity in its modern predicament. He identified himself with the forces that were to form the world of tomorrow and tried to transcend these forces in his expectations."¹ In al-Ādāb (which had appeared in Beirut in January 1953, edited by Dr. Suahyl Idrīs) he published "Yawm at-Tughāt al-Akhir" as a symbol of the world which he was discarding, while the new world is that described by the rebel girl:

Say "We are the beginning of the road —
And we are those who have squeezed out life."²

Then in the June issue of 1954 of the same magazine he published "Unshūdat al-Matar", written during the turmoil of that year and the disastrous floods of the Tigris, in which he gave vent to his love and compassion for his country as well as his optimistic hopes for its final salvation. Many other poems from this period shed light on his major interests, works like "al-Mukhbir" and al-Mūmis al-‘Amyā’,³ both of which reveal a greater concern for the psychological states of individuals, as well as a vital awareness of political and social events.

1. Boullata, p. 87.
Meanwhile he had decided that he should marry, so in June 1955 the marriage contract was signed in Basra and as-Sayyāb returned to Baghdad with his new wife, Iqābāl, a teacher in her early twenties from a respectable family in Abū l-Khaṣīb.

Several months later he collected together the translations from English which he had been working on, from the poetry of many great literary figures, including Tagore, Nazim Hikmet, Rilke, Neruda, Eliot, Sitwell, Pound, Lorca and Spender, and published them under the title Qaṣā'id Mukhtāra min ash-Shi'r al-ʿĀlamī al-Ḥadīth.¹

Gradually he began to move in more refined social circles and was introduced through his friend Jabra Ibrāhim Jabra to people like the Palestinian poetess, Salmā l-Khaḍrā al-Jayyūsī and to Samīra Azzām, the Palestinian story-writer. Furthermore, in October 1956, he was promoted to the position of Assistant Superintendent at the Directorate of Imports and Exports, but his financial position was still difficult as his family responsibilities had increased and his father pestered him continually for money. For this reason he became associated with Shi'r (published in Beirut, and edited by Yūsuf al-Khāl) and Sha'b, the Baghdad newspaper of Yahyā Qāsim, for which as-Sayyāb edited the weekly supplement concentrating mostly on literature, taking care not to compromise himself politically.

His poetry reflects his attitude at this time, and any political allusion is ambiguous and open to dispute. However the impression which he gives is one of optimism, and the Arab nations are repeatedly portrayed as poised between death and a new, fruitful life. With the birth of his son, Ghaylān, in November 1957 this outlook deepened and the child became a symbol for the continuity of existence, and

¹ Qaṣā'id Mukhtāra min ash-Shi'r al-ʿĀlamī al-Ḥadīth (Baghdad, 1955).
especially of hope for a fertile Iraq, although doubts still lurk close by:

From which sun did your warmth come, from which star in the sky,
Stealing into the iron cage, so that tomorrow blossoms in my blood?¹

With the revolution of July 14th, 1958 as-Sayyāb left his job and returned to being a teacher at al-ʿAẓamiyya Preparatory School, but his political stand against the atrocities perpetrated by the communists caused him to lose it again.² Jabrā Ibrāhīm Jabrā managed to find him a job with the Iraq Petroleum Company, but this also was lost because of ministerial disapproval. Dogged by political disfavour as-Sayyāb finally had to content himself with a minor and part-time job as a translator for the Pakistani Embassy.

It was in these economic straits that as-Sayyāb left for Beirut in July 1960, to have some of his recent works published there, and decided to submit some poems to a competition being run by Shiʿr magazine, winning the prize of L.L. 1,000 for the best entry.

On his return to Iraq his situation continued to give cause for hope, and he was re-appointed as Chief Superintendent in the Directorate of Imports and Exports after the abolition of his three year suspension order. He started work on August 16th, 1960 but he was not happy there as Baghdad held too many painful associations for him, and furthermore his health was beginning to deteriorate. In a letter to

Adonis (‘Alī Aḥmad Sa‘īd) he complained, "Yearning for Jaykūr and Buwayyb and the other playgrounds of my childhood has shaken me."¹

So, in spite of an improvement in his health, he decided to leave Baghdad, and resigned his job on 22nd January, 1961 and moved south to Basra. Once there Major General Muzhir ash-Shāwī invited him to work for the Ports Authority, of which he was Director General.

Thus on February 6th as-Sayyāb became Chief Superintendent at the Directorate of Cultural Affairs in the Ports Authority for a salary of I.D. 52. But his health was deteriorating and he was beginning to find some difficulty in moving both his legs, as well as experiencing pain in the lower region of his back.

The birth of his second daughter brought new responsibilities and it was also decided that, as he was once again in government service, he should repay the pension gratuity which he had received in 1959, plus 5½% interest. In an attempt to assist him Muzhir ash-Shāwī appointed as-Sayyāb to the editorial board of the Ports Authority's official magazine (al-Mawanā), but none of his works were ever published in it and, apart from a few duties, he had very little to do with the magazine. During this period he wrote very little poetry, but what he did write shows a strong inclination towards introspection and reminiscences.² His continued poor health was obviously one of the main factors in the creation of the sense of conflict encountered in these poems, and when he wrote "ʿAmāma Bāb ʿAllāh" he had reached the lowest point of dejection in his life:

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1. Diwān, 2, p. 74.
Prostrate I shout, cleaving the stones:
"I want to die, O God!"

In summer 1961 as-Sayyāb received an invitation to the Conference on Contemporary Arabic Literature in Rome (October 1961). There he met many famous people and was especially pleased to make the acquaintance of Stephen Spender, as well as renew his friendship with old friends like Salmā l-Khaḍrā' al-Jayyūsī. His paper on "Commitment and Non-Commitment in Modern Arabic Literature" was welcomed favourably and during the conference John Hunt, the Secretary of the Congress for Cultural Freedom, told Albert Hourani that the Congress was willing to give as-Sayyāb a scholarship to study somewhere in England, and Hourani promised to help him to find a university that would accept him. As-Sayyāb also saw the possibility of obtaining better medical treatment in England so he had Jabra Ibrāhīm Jabra ask Hourani to help him in this field as well.

Back in Iraq both the communists and Arab Nationalists attacked as-Sayyāb as a renegade, failing to recognize that he was no longer a strong influence or mouthpiece of political ideologies. In fact his poetry was displaying a growing nostalgia for the past, his illness colouring all his thought and emotion, so that his poems sometimes leave the reader with the impression of a man who had lost the world in his own microcosm of pain. But sometimes the old voice murmurs through his words and, writing to Yusuf al-Khāl, he said, "Why bother about the world, let it go the way it pleases; yet a voice underneath whispers, 'It is my world and the direction it takes concerns me.'"

1. Diwān, I, p. 139.
Under this influence he wrote "al-Ma'bad al-Gharlg" (The Sunken Temple), which cannot be numbered amongst his best poems as it labours under the burden of symbolism and allusions to far-off Malaya, which require footnotes to be comprehensible. The Buddhist temple, submerged with all its treasures, is a symbol for Asia, which must raise itself up from the tyranny of foreign nations before the long night of Asia will come to an end. Again, in "Ibn Shahīd"¹ he describes the horrifying events of the "red upsurge" in Iraq in vivid detail, and symbolises the Arab nationalists in the figure of the young boy who, dressed in the large uniform of his fallen father, is encouraged in the hope of a brighter future by his mother.

Thus the poet, closely involved with the affairs of his nation and mankind, continued his fight but only with his pen and his companion, pain. He could no longer walk without assistance and a friend had to convey him to and from work. Then, in the middle of April 1962, he took fifteen days leave and flew to Beirut for proper medical treatment at the American University there. While in hospital some friends managed to gain him the concession of free treatment, although he still had to pay the hospital bill. The final diagnosis of the doctors in Beirut was amytrophic lateral sclerosis syndrome, but no medication was prescribed and, on April 29th as-Sayyāb decided to leave the hospital. After that he received some treatment from Dr. Zeuch, a German orthopaedist in Beirut, for more than two months. During this time his poetry reflects his feelings of helplessness, but his interest in freedom movements continued.²

¹. Dīwān, 1, p. 176, and p. 197.
When a masseuse hired by Dr. Zeuch, called Cecile Calandra, offered
to treat as-Sayyāb, asking for only half the fees initially and half
when he was cured, he accepted and, through Khalil Ḥāwī and the
Minister for Health, managed to recover some of the fees he had paid
to Dr. Zeuch. On June 24th as-Sayyāb renewed his sickleave and
continued his treatment in Beirut, but no improvement in his condition
took place so he returned to Basra and reported to the Ports Authority
on September 8th, 1962. Cecile Calandra tried to collect the
remaining half of her fee through the Italian Embassy in Iraq, but
there is no evidence that he ever paid her.

Having tested the more orthodox medical treatments, as-Sayyāb
resorted to folk-medicine, using medical herbs and even magical
incantations¹, while arrangements were being made for his journey to
England. But it was not until the middle of December that as-Sayyāb
left Basra for Baghdad and thence to London, where he arrived on the
16th. Once in London Denys Johnson-Davies (the editor of Aquāt)
aranged for as-Sayyāb to see a London physician, who referred him
to the consultant neurologist at St. Mary's Hospital, who admitted
him for further investigation.

On January 4th, 1963 as-Sayyāb left for Durham hoping for a cure
when he returned to London a month later. After a brief, but unhappy,
interlude in Durham², he returned to London where he entered hospital
again until the middle of February, when, having been told that his
condition was terminal, he immediately started making arrangements
with Simon Jargy in Paris to see a French specialist. On February 16th
he returned to Durham to collect his baggage, and then, on March 15th,

1. See Boullata, p. 186.
flew to Paris on his way home, accompanied by the friend who had travelled to Durham with him, who was especially necessary as he was now unable to walk. The French specialist's diagnosis concurred completely with that of his doctors in London.

As-Sayyāb returned to Iraq. Less than two weeks after his return to Basra politics again cast a shadow over his life, and he was suspended from government service for three years from April 4th, 1963, in accordance with the law for the Purge of the Government System (1958); having praised Qāsim he was hardly popular with the new régime. He was not re-appointed until 11th July of the same year.

Throughout this period he continued to search for a cure, even allowing his legs and back to be cauterized by a bedouin quack at az-Zubayr and, in despair, also accepted treatment from the Sādāt of Basra, who professed knowledge of spiritual healing, at whose hands he experienced a temporary, if autosuggestive, improvement. Thereafter his condition declined steadily until he could hardly stand and became bed-ridden. Then, on February 9th, 1964 he was admitted to the Ports Hospital in Basra in a critical condition, with a fever of 40°C and dyspnea, symptoms which were diagnosed as indicative of pneumonia and early heart failure. He received emergency treatment for one week, after which he improved slightly as they treated one symptom methodically after another. By April he had used up all his sickleave and annual leave with full pay, as well as his right to sickleave on half pay, so he started his 180 days of sickleave without pay permitted to him.

The Iraqi Writers and Authors Association in Baghdad wrote to the Ministry of Health asking that as-Sayyāb should receive special treatment in Baghdad, but by the time the red tape had been slashed
away other arrangements had been made to have him treated in Kuwait at the expense of the Kuwaiti government. 'Alī as-Sabtī had publicly requested that the Kuwaiti Minister of Health should sponsor as-Sayyāb's treatment in Kuwait at the government's expense, and so, in the light of a positive response from the Ministry, as-Sayyāb flew by Iraqi Airlines to Kuwait on July 6th, where he was immediately admitted to the Amīrī Hospital.

Although he was failing fast physically he retained full mental awareness and, while in hospital, wrote poems such as "Fi Ghābat az-Zalām" where he begs for "the bullet of mercy" from God. He received daily visits from friends, among them Salmā 1-Khaḍrī, al-Jayyūsī with her husband, and Nājī ‘Allūsh, as well as the Kuwaiti Minister of Health, ‘Abd al-Laṭīf Muḥammad ath-Thunayyān. He also had long sessions with poets, writers and journalists, which often went on very late and tired him considerably. When his wife arrived with her children, Ghaydā', Alā' and Ghaylān, on August 6th as-Sayyāb was both pleased and upset; pleased at seeing them and upset by his own impotence and by the fact that he knew he should soon leave them.

Then, in September, he suffered two severe attacks of bronchitis which weakened his waning strength still further, while his mental state was further undermined by a letter from the Basri Ports Authority, which arrived before he had recovered from the last attack, informing him that he must either return to work or be pensioned off. During October he became too weak to eat and had to be fed through a nasal tube and, as the debility and disorder of his nervous system began to affect his brain, he started to suffer from fits of raving and hallucination, during which he saw "two giant jinn wrestling by his

1. Diwān, 1, p. 704.
window, so that he was frightened”, as well as other spirits which persecuted him. In his more lucid moments he would apologise to his friends for anything he might have said to distress them during such fits, and at such times wrote poems like “Ukkâz fi l-Jahîm” and “Iqâl wa-l-Laylâ”.

In the first of these two poems he announces his desire for annihilation:

So open your door, do not leave it closed before my misery,
And feed my body to the fire!.

In “Iqâl wa-l-Laylâ”, which may have been his last poem, he describes his situation:

On a bed, like a coffin were it not for the groans and the blood which flows,
In a room like the grave, in the bowels of a hospital laden with beds.

Back in Basra the ports authority had given his family notice to quit within a month or pay the arrears in the rent, water and electricity dues.

In December the fits of raving became more and more numerous, the disturbances becoming practically continual, while he no longer recognised the voices of his friends. He then began to undergo long

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2. Diwân, 1, p. 691, and p. 716.
3. Ibid., p. 693.
4. Ibid., p. 717.
terms of unconsciousness but, when he came to, he had full control of his mental faculties. Finally, at 3 p.m. on December 24th, 1964 he died.

His body was transported by car to Basra, where it was taken to his house but it was empty, his family having been evicted by government order. The corpse was then taken to the house of a friend, where ‘Ali as-Sabti was told that everybody had gone to the mosque to receive the body and attend the funeral. After the funeral the body was taken, through the pouring rain, to az-Zubayr, accompanied by only a few men, and buried in the cemetery of al-Hasan al-Basri.

Thus ended the life of a great poet. A life "marked by failure, suffering and exile on account of his political beliefs, and of disease and slow death towards the end." His life was full of ideals and aspirations all of which, like his love for Lam'a, met with opposition which led to disillusionment and thence to bitterness. It is significant that he wrote the following words to a friend: "The years have passed and I yearn for love, but I have not obtained any nor have I known it; what need have I of love as long as my grandmother's heart beats with love for me?" Perhaps he never again found the love he was looking for because it was an idealised type of love, which does not exist.

Likewise his dealings with the communist party were based on deep-felt moral and social principles rather than sectarian affiliation and, as the paths followed by as-Sayyáb and the party diverged further

and further from each other, acrimony set in, causing him much pain because of the opposition of the very big party for which he had previously suffered.

Perhaps it is this aura of suffering and disillusionment which proved the best medium for his great and peculiar talent, and although his life was not a victory in the political arena and his final dispatcher not "a bullet whose death-like chill would penetrate the deepest recesses" of his heart, the conquest of his poetry is surely indisputable.

**Political and Literary Activities**

As-Sayyāb's life was greatly influenced by both his own political activities and the power machinations of the various parties in Iraq. Like so many young Iraqis at that time as-Sayyāb was educated to see the western powers as imperialistic, and to see any opposition to the British as friendly towards countries like Iraq. In this way the Iraqis, especially the younger generation, viewed Germany as the upholder of civil rights during the Second World War, never dreaming of the true nature of the conflict nor of the actual events in Europe. Even the politicians had a distorted perspective concerning the situation in Europe, the important world in their view ending at Istanbul. It was against such an impractical and idealistic back-cloth that the politics of Iraq during most of as-Sayyāb's lifetime must be viewed. As-Sayyāb, with his poetic sensibilities, education and family background, committed himself more passionately and suffered greater disillusionment than many of his compatriots.

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He was not the first member of the as-Sayyāb family to dabble in politics. His uncles had been involved in nationalism during the period of Ottoman control, and his grandfather's house in Jaykūr boasted pictures of Abū t-Timman, Sa'd Zaghlūl and Kemal Atatürk. This factor plus the politics of his era and the economic exploitation of the small landowners, like as-Sayyāb's grandfather, at the hands of the more powerful landlords, gave him a deep sense of grievance and drew him inevitably towards socialist ideologies, and particularly to the League of Iraqi Communists.

Although the communist party in Iraq had been declared illegal and forced underground in 1938 various communist groupings had been organized by the end of 1941. Some of these, like The League of Iraqi Communists, could claim quite a large following from amongst the intelligentsia "but failed to create a unified front owing to their disagreement both on personal and procedural grounds." When, in 1945, the government lifted some of the restrictions previously imposed upon political parties the communists were still forbidden to organise a party bearing the name of Taharrur al-Waṭan (The National Liberation Party) and were thus forced to continue their clandestine activities, inciting student unrest and workers' strikes, under the leadership of Muḥammad ash-Shabībī. The students at different colleges formed themselves into several unions and as-Sayyāb was elected as head of the union at the Higher Teachers' Training College in Baghdad. This, in addition to the fact that he was one of the poetic spokesmen of the

1. Diwān, 2, p. 28.
movement, along with 'Ali Jalīl al-Wardī and Jāsim al-Jabūrī, made the college authorities suspicious of him, especially as the student body supported him with great enthusiasm.

As anti-western feeling mounted at the college the leftist movement attracted more supporters and, when the authorities decided to add a further year to the four year course, the student body dissented so as-Sayyāb, as their leader, called for a strike and encouraged the students to participate in it. Next he contacted other colleges, requesting support, and the resulting solidarity brought about a successful conclusion to their claims, so that the administration now looked on as-Sayyāb with disfavour, in spite of his academic qualifications, and on 2nd January 1946 the Faculty Board suspended him for the rest of the academic year, because of his "urging [the students] to strike, his creating of a bad atmosphere at college preventing understanding (contrary to what is expected of him), his contacting the students in other colleges to support the strike and his spreading of harmful propaganda." They added that he had not been finally dismissed because of his "poetic potentialities" and because it was his first infraction of the regulations in three years.

As-Sayyāb returned to Jaykūr but May found him again in Baghdad. Shortly thereafter he took part in peaceful demonstrations in Baghdad protesting against the Anglo-American policy in Palestine, which favoured Zionism, and in June he was present at a demonstration which demanded a favourable solution to the Palestine problem and an immediate curtailment of the British presence in Iraq. During these rallies several clashes took place between the demonstrators and the

1. Boullata, p. 44.
police, after which newspapers were suspended and many arrests made, as-Sayyāb being one of those arrested. He was taken to Ba‘qūba prison near Baghdad where he was held until midsummer, after which he travelled to Jaykūr, returning to Baghdad in the autumn of the same year. His sojourn in prison had affected him deeply and a year later he wrote "Sajīn"¹, drawing upon his experiences in Ba‘qūba, experiences which were to influence him throughout his life. On his return to Baghdad he had to sign a written undertaking that he would not belong to any political organisation and to produce a good-conduct certificate from the Directorate of Police before resuming his studies.

With his political wings clipped as-Sayyāb turned his attention more to his poetry, and in 1947 his first diwān, Azhār Dhābilā was published in Egypt, and reached Baghdad in the second half of December 1947. In this collection his famous "Hal Kāma Hubban" appeared², dated 29/11/46, which many have claimed to be the first true example of ash-shi‘r al-hurr in Arabic verse, while others claim it to have been Nāzik al-Malā‘ika’s "Cholera" (composed 27/10/47). "Cholera" was known in Iraq before as-Sayyāb’s poem although his was definitely composed first, but he himself conceded that ‘Alī Ahmad Bākathīr’s Romeo and Juliet³ was the first of the genre and also that Khalīl

¹. Diwān, 1, p. 79.
². Ibid., p. 101.
Shaybūb had also composed poetry in "free verse". However, although the disputes still continue, the important feature of both these poems is that they were written by poets of sufficient stature to arouse interest and a following in the right place and at the right time, and the result was a flood of poems of varying standards written in "free verse" of one sort or another.

Then, in December 1947, the government of Šāliḥ Jabr opened official negotiations with Great Britain with the intention of improving the Anglo-Iraqi Treaty of 1930, without prior consultation with representatives of the other leading factions in Iraq. Both Ernest Bevin, the British Foreign Secretary, and Jabr were pleased with the signing of the Portsmouth Treaty (15/1/48) but neither the Iraqi opposition nor the populace agreed. Demonstrations broke out in Baghdad before the terms of the treaty were made public, but when the text was released on January 16th the situation became even more volatile. The student agitators who organized the demonstrations at the various colleges declared a three day strike, which soon spread to offices and amongst the workers generally. With each day anti-British feelings mounted and as-Sayyāb took part in many demonstrations, reciting poetry and making speeches, surrounded by a protective cordon of fellow Basrans and other students. The police took harsh measures, and about 200 people were injured and 50 were killed, from amongst both the students and the police. But the unrest continued in spite of the Regent's disclamatory announcement concerning the treaty, and the severely weakened police force found it impossible to keep order,

while the army could not be involved for political reasons. The public funerals for the dead students were attended by thousands and as-Sayyāb recited a poem whose first lines were "vengeance boils with anger. Cry out, O victim souls." Eventually Jabr was forced to resign (27/1/48) and Muḥammad aṣ-Ṣadr was called upon to form a cabinet, assuming office on 29/1/48 and immediately dissolving parliament. The situation calmed down but the student rallies continued and, at a special memorial meeting for the students who had died during the disturbances, as-Sayyāb recited another poem, starting with, "The roar of running blood/Still fills the ears of Time." Unfortunately, although some of the poems he wrote at this time have found their way into various publications, most of his political poems have been lost to us.

In the Spring of 1948 as-Sayyāb was elected to represent the student body in the college at the first international rally of students in Iraq held in Baghdad. Although the communists were by far the most powerful section of the I. U. S., and managed to further their aims at this rally through the many Iraqi communist students who were present, the government chose not to suppress it, but with the outbreak of the Palestinian War martial law was immediately declared. The failure of the Arabs in this war was a bitter blow to the heady fervour of the Iraqi students, and as-Sayyāb was as depressed and disappointed as his fellow students. Yet this disillusionment was only the beginning of the oppression and humiliation that he was to be submitted to.

1. Boullata, p. 54.
2. Ibid.
When Nūrī as-Sa‘īd became Premier and the discontent continued the government blamed the communists and the Police Department were ordered to investigate both the party and its leaders. During a surprise raid in January 1949 Yūsuf Salmān Yūsuf, better known as Comrade Fahd, the organiser of the secret Communist Party, and several other leaders were taken and brought to trial, receiving severe sentences. Then, further arrests were made and the four principal leaders, Yūsuf Salmān Yūsuf, Yahūdā Ṣadīq, Zākī Basīm and Ḥusayn Muḥammad ash-Shāḥībī, were condemned to death, the sentences being carried out on February 14th, 1949, amidst public protest.¹

As-Sayyāb was amongst those arrested in January 1949 and was then transported to Baghdad from ar-Ramādī (where he had been teaching since October 1948) and, although he was released a few weeks later, was barred from teaching for ten years from 25/1/49. During the next few months as-Sayyāb found himself unemployed and depressed, but he received some help from ‘Alī 1-Khaqānī who offered to publish his latest collection, Asārīn, which appeared in Najaf in September 1950.

In spite of these experiences he remained loyal to the party and continued to sign the petition of the Ansār as-Salām² every year. However his political problems were not yet over. In March 1951 Dr. Mossadegh became Prime Minister in Iran and nationalised the foreign oil companies, and the Iraqi Deputies, encouraged by his success, also demanded nationalisation. The government and the oil

1. For the suppression of the Communist Party in Iraq see Khadduri, p. 273-6.

2. The Ansār as-Salām was a group initially formed by the then illegal communist party as a cover for their activities. Every year "members" of the party would sign a petition along with people from other parties or non-aligned individuals, thus re-affirming their adherence to the movement.
companies eventually reached agreement and the terms were ratified in February 1952, granting half of the companies' profits to Iraq. The opposition was not, however, satisfied and tried to sabotage the agreement by a general strike and demonstrations, but prompt action from Nūrī as-Sa‘īd thwarted their attempts. In November of the same year the opposition tried to force the Regent to accept, among other things, direct universal suffrage and the limitation of land ownership. When the Regent's reply failed to satisfy them a student strike was organised at the Pharmacy College in Baghdad, which turned into violent demonstrations and finally exploded into riots which terrorised the city, and in which as-Sayyāb took part with his fellow communists. This time the army was summoned and its Chief of Staff, General Nūr ad-Dīn Maḥmūd became Premier, and declared martial law, closed schools, suppressed the press and ordered the arrest of those communists who had taken part in the disturbances. As-Sayyāb contemplated escaping into Iran through the north, and ironically moved to Ba‘qūba in preparation for his flight, but then decided to travel south to Basra, disguised in traditional garb (in kūfiyya and dishdāsha). After travelling to Musayyab and then, by train, to Basra and by car to Jaykūr, he crossed the Shaṭṭ al-‘Arab to Abadan. On January 12th, 1953 he was officially dismissed from government service, with effect from 25/11/52.

However his refuge in Iran was only temporary as Dr. Mossadegh had already lost control and the Iranian communists had been forced underground, although they still wielded considerable influence. So, early in 1953 as-Sayyāb left Abadan for Kuwait, with an Iranian passport bearing the name 'Alī Artank, a trip which he later immortalised
in his poem "Firār Ām 1953". While in Kuwait he passed a lonely and fruitless year working as a clerk for the Kuwait Electrical Co., and living with men who, although they shared his political leanings, had little in common with him and viewed him as a mere mouthpiece for their cause, much less important than an "active struggler of the party." 

With his return to Iraq as-Sayyāb removed himself from active participation in politics, although he continued to involve himself in current events in his poetry, and was especially interested in liberation movements. In al-Mūmis al-‘Amyā' (first published in Baghdad, 1954) he adds, as a footnote, "Is it not a shame on us, Arabs, that our daughters are prostitutes sleeping with men of every race and colour" when they should live "as human beings and heirs to the glories of the Arab nation?" Furthermore in al-Asliha wa-l-Atfāl he calls for peace and freedom from the despotism of the armaments manufacturers, who enjoy their riches in luxury while others suffer the fruits of their business. Indeed many of his major works of the early 1950s shows his preoccupation with the universal affairs concerning mankind: Fair as-Salām (1951), Haffār al-Qubūr (1952), al-Mūmis al-‘Amyā' (1954) and al-Asliha wa-l-Atfāl (1954). All of these poems were unusually long, which was a new experiment in Iraqi poetry, which tended to be more brief at this time.

Obviously as-Sayyāb’s painful experiences had taught him the lesson of discretion and this, plus the influence of Eliot's The Waste

1. Diwān, 1, p. 201.
2. Boullata, p. 79.
Land and Jabrā Ibrāhīm Jabrā’s translation of The Golden Bough (1954), led him to the use of myth and symbolism by which he concealed any political view expressed in his poetry, while adding aesthetically to its form. "Min Ru’vā Fū Kāy"¹, which was first published in January 1955, shows a rather stilted attempt in the use of mythology, especially as he employed images from far-eastern folklore which required numerous footnotes in order to render it understandable to the reader. "Kadinat as-Sindibād"², however, is a far more natural poem, and both allusions to the present and myths from the past are skilfully woven together presenting a very effective picture of Baghdad during Qāsim’s regime.³

Throughout 1955 as-Sayyāb busied himself with translating works from several western poets through the medium of English, displaying no obvious interest in the Baghdad Pact which finally isolated Iraq from the rest of the Arab world as well as from the mainstream of Arab politics. But when he published his translations under the title Qaṣā'id Mukhṭara⁴ the authorities took offence at some of the poetry he had chosen to translate, and he was arrested and held in the Kāṣimiyyah police station for seven days. The court failed to find any legal fault in the content of the book but, finally, fined him I.D. 5 for failing to mention the name of the printing press under the Ottoman Ordinance of 1323 A.H.. No wonder the poem "Ta‘tīm"⁵ which he published in al-ʿAdāb in December 1955 is so vague and abstruse, concealing his virulent attacks on "dictatorial, freedom-robbing régimes."⁶

2. Ibid., p. 463.
4. See note 1, p. 12.
5. Diwān, 1, p. 335.
The events in other Arab states, such as the struggle for independence in North Africa continued to influence him, but he continually disavowed affiliation to any political party, and so, when the manifesto supporting the Algerian revolt was drawn up, as-Sayyāb signed it, but only after officially stating that he had no connection whatsoever with the communist party, as many left-wingers had also signed it. His poetry during this period shows a style which had become skilfully ambivalent or equivocal so that one poem in particular, "Uchniyā Ḥī Shahr Āb", brought the accusation of plagiarism down upon his head from al-Bayāṭī, who believed that it was a copy of "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock". The content of the poem, however, and the use of the word "Tammāsin" with its two-fold connotation of July and the ancient fertility god, surely indicates a deeper, more political theme. The fact that he succeeded in misleading the government as to the true nature of his poetry during this period is obvious from the fact that they nominated him as an official delegate to the Second Conference of Arab Writers to be held in Syria between 20-27th September 1956, along with M. Bahjat al-Atharl and Nāzīk al-Malā'ika. As-Sayyāb's lecture dealt with the "Means of Acquainting the Arabs with their Modern Literary Output" (Wasa'il Taʿrif al-ʿArab bi -Nītāmilim al-Adabī al-Ḥadīth), in which he dwelt much more on his own personal ideas about good literature than with how to introduce the Arabic-speaking people to it. In spite of this his lecture was well received, and Mikhail Naimy described his impression of as-Sayyāb at the conference as that of

2. Ibid., p. 328. See Boullata, p. 114.
a man who was rather bashful by nature, and who was subject to a melancholy resulting from spiritual and material causes: as if he suffered from an alienation in his country and among his own relations, or as if he was searching for a lost thing but did not find his way to it.  

In Iraq the Suez War was stirring up a violent reaction amongst the intelligentsia and populace alike. Never before had the Arab nations displayed such solidarity, and even the pro-Western Nūrī as-Sā’īd was forced to boycott all meetings of the Baghdad Pact and break off all diplomatic relations with France. Meetings were held all over Iraq to show support for Egypt and condemnation for the aggressors, and as-Sayyāb attended one held at the Teachers’ Training College in Baghdad where he recited the poem "Nūr Sā’īd" which was later published in al-Funūn. Perhaps the closing lines of this poem uncover some of the frustration felt by as-Sayyāb at this time because of his political inactivity:

I feel ashamed that my poetry and not my blood meets you and that I should gain victory by what you have sacrificed, For it is but a red bouquet that I bring you whose flowers are sprinkled with my blood.  

When Shi‘r, the new quarterly magazine of Yūsuf al-Khāl devoted totally to poetry, began to appear in winter 1957 as-Sayyāb was excited

1. Boullata, p. 120.
2. Diwān, 1, p. 492.
and was soon a regular contributor to it, and, in its second number (Spring 1957), published "an-Nahr wa-l-Mawt". Simultaneously, he ceased contributing to al-Adab, perhaps because of a personal disagreement with Dr. Suhayl Idris, or perhaps because of the abatement in his political commitment, and took a part-time post in the evening at the Baghdad newspaper of Yahya Qasim, ash-Sharb, which was notorious for its leanings towards the west. All of this indicates a baffling conflict with his previous attitudes and contemporary situation, yet his poetry continued to reflect his private involvement with the struggle to find an Arab identity, and his hopes that the suffering of the present would be washed away by a more prosperous future, when the people could rest from their combat:

After they nailed me, I turned my eyes towards the city.
I could hardly recognise the plain and the wall and the cemetery:
There was something, as far as the eye could see,
Like a budding forest,
There was, in every spot, a cross and a sorrowful mother.
May the Lord be praised!
This is the birth pangs of the city.

As-Sayyab felt himself jammed between the giants of the west and those of the east and, as the Cold War set in, he suffered the same alienation as most of the Iraqi intelligensia from the Sa'id regime,

1. Diwan, 1, p. 453.
which tended towards the west. However his economic position and his policy of non-involvement forced him to continue working for ash-Sha'b, thus cutting him off even more from the Arab nationalists. When the ruling régime fell on the fourteenth of July (1958) and Qāsim came to power as-Sayyāb believed that the rain had finally come to Iraq. In September he resigned his post at the Directorate of Imports and Exports, which he had held since October 1956, and took up a teaching post at the Aţāmiyya Preparatory School, as well as a part-time job as editor of al-Jumhūriyya, which fully supported the new administration.

But, as the communist power increased and their reign of terror set in, as-Sayyāb's attitude clearly became anti-communist and his open criticism of his colleagues at the Directorate of Commerce aroused their anger and so, when he refused to sign the denunciation of Nasser, they reported him to the police. He was released after five days but the effects of their hostility were more insidious and he was suspended from government service for three years and granted a pensionary gratuity of I.D. 546.

On the anniversary of Revolution Day, 14th July 1959, the political atrocities perpetrated by both the Communists and the opposing factions culminated in Kirkūk, where the police fired into a demonstration of about 400 workers, killing several while an unestimated number of men and women were maimed or murdered in the ensuing massacres.¹ Thereafter Qāsim began to curtail the power of the communists by playing them off against the Pan-Arab elements in Iraqi society. For once on the side of the government as-Sayyāb published a

¹ See Khadduri, p. 274-5; also Dann, Uriel, Iraq under Qassem: A Political History (Israel U.P., 1969), p. 223-6 and index.
series of articles in *al-Hurriyya*, entitled "I was a Communist"¹, which although of little literary value were read avidly and thus exerted no little influence on the public at large. However his growing hostility towards Qāsim and his myrmidons is disclosed in two famous poems from this era of his life, "Madinah bi-lā Maṭar" and "Sarbarūs ff Bābil"², especially in the latter where the three-headed dog who eats Tammūz, sucks out his eyes and breaks his strong back, symbolises Qāsim, who scatters the "roses and the anemones" carried in Tammūz’s jars. Then, in June 1960, *Ru’yā ff ‘Ām 1956"³ appeared in al-Adab*, its title deliberately falsified so as to mislead the censors, which is especially obvious in view of the references to Hafṣa al-‘Umarī and Shakhnūb, in whom the false resurrection of Iraq is symbolised.

In the same year as-Sayyāb went to Beirut to see to the publishing of some of his poems and while there entered and won the poetry competition, sponsored by the Arabian Insurance Company, with "Unshūdat al-Maṭar" which was later published by Publishing House of the Shi'īr magazine in Beirut. After returning to Iraq he decided to move away from Baghdad and its painful memories to Basra but, after moving there in January 1961, he discovered that an order had been issued for his arrest for taking part in a demonstration in Baghdad. He protested immediately that he had not even been in Baghdad at that time and another directive was issued on February twentieth ordering his release.

In the same year he received an invitation to attend a conference on contemporary Arabic literature that was to be held in Rome in

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1. See Boullata, p. 141.
October. In his paper, "Commitment and Non-Commitment in Modern Arabic Literature" he showed the same tendency to rely on his own experiences rather than on scholarship, as had been the case in Syria in 1956. But again the paper was met with appreciation and interest by the erudite gathering which included old friends like Jabrā Ibrāhīm Jabrā and Salmā l-Khaḍrā' al-Jayyūsī, as well as famous literary and scholarly figures such as Simon Jargy, Albert Hourani, Maria Nallino, Giorgio Della Vida and Stephen Spender. As-Sayyāb was especially pleased to meet Stephen Spender who shared experiences of communism very similar to his own.

When he returned to Iraq both the communists and the Arab nationalists attacked him as a renegade and as-Sayyāb must have been grateful to escape to Beirut in April 1962 to receive medical treatment there. While in Beirut he was visited by Dr. Suhayl Idrīs who took a copy of "Ibn Shahīd"¹ from him which was published in the June issue of al-Adāb, which as-Sayyāb had abandoned since 1957 in favour of Shi‘r (with one exception in June 1960). This further shift in magazines necessitated some sort of explanation so a footnote was added to the poem in which he said, "It pleases me that the lost son returns home".² Yet he also continued his personal and friendly relations with Yūsuf al-Khāl (editor of Shi‘r and Adāb) while informing Dr. Suhayl Idrīs that he would cease to be the Iraqi correspondent of Adāb, the new sister-magazine of Shi‘r.

Perhaps the real reason for such apparent contradictions lies in the fact that the fiery brand of as-Sayyāb's political fervour had been reduced through tribulations and sickness to a less destructive, more

1. Diwān, 1, p. 197.
2. See Boullata, p. 181.
introspective flame. However it had not yet been reduced to embers, and when he heard about the coup d'état in Iraq in February 1963, which brought Qāsim’s rule to an end, he wrote "Qasīda ilā 1-‘Irāq ath-Thā‘īr" which was published in al-Ādāb (March 1963). He then sent this and several others to Beirut to be published as Manzil al- Ağnān (March 1963), for which he received an immediate payment, but which he liked the least of all his diwāns because the poems contained therein had been written in haste.

When he returned to Iraq once more he started acting as the literary correspondent for Hiwār in Iraq, having first obtained the approval of John Hunt, the Secretary of the Congress for Cultural Freedom in Paris who sponsored this magazine, and sent quarterly reports to Tawfīq Sāyīgh about current literary activities in his country. He also contributed some poems to this magazine in spite of the vicious attacks mounted against it by the intellectuals, who saw it as an imperialist instrument of infiltration. However as-Sayyāb’s reason for contributing to Hiwār may be partly explained by the fact that the magazine paid well for every contribution and, soon after his return to Basra, he had discovered that, having praised Qāsim in the past, he had been suspended from government service for three years from 4/4/63.

These economic factors, together with the steady deterioration in his health, reduced him to a psychological state that was hardly conducive to poetic composition, but he continued with his translations, working on the section Jabra Ibrāhīm Jabrā had allocated to him from a book called American Poetry and Prose, which was later published in Beirut.

1. Diwān, 1, p. 309.
As-Sayyāb's physical condition now made it impossible for him to work and he even found it impossible to write poetry with any frequency, so he decided to collect together a number of poems from two of his earlier collections (Aṣḥār Dḥābila and Aṣāṭīr), refurbish them and publish them in Beirut under the title Aṣḥār wa-ʿAṣāṭīr (October 1963).

Meanwhile his opponents continued to attack him for his past political contradictions as well as for his present lack of commitment, while his connections with Ḥiwrār proved to be a further weapon against him. They still insisted on judging him by his political activities and poetry of the past, and in viewing him as "the giant of modern Arabic poetry that ought to live up to his word."¹ He had, however, often pointed out in the past that while the poet should render a debt to society he should not "be made a slave to this theory", and that a poet who is "sincere in his expression of life in every respect" will be compelled to "give expression to society's woes and hopes without being forced to do so by anyone. Likewise he will give expression to his own woes and private feelings which, at their deepest, are the feelings of the majority of this society."² As-Sayyāb was now expressing his personal woes and feelings and they were those of a tired and frustrated man, facing a slow, creeping death which frightened him, but which he sometimes faced squarely with haunting immediacy:

When God sees him face to face,
Crawling on his chest,

¹ Boullata, p. 209.
His broken crushed spirit
Shining through his supplicating eyes,
In mercy God will weep for him,
And ask him for forgiveness.¹

In talking of his fellow patient as-Sayyāb was talking of himself, in this poem the cosmos is meaningfully restricted to these two men and the God who permitted them to suffer thus, while the rest of society figures only in as much as they too are subject to God's seemingly capricious will. It is little wonder that as-Sayyāb should write to a friend,

I only write purely personal poetry these days.
I am no longer committed. What have I gained from commitment? This sickness and this poverty?
Perhaps I am now living the last days of my life
... I am producing the best I have ever produced
... But my attitude towards death has changed.
I am no longer afraid of it. Let it come when it may. I feel that I have lived long.²

His life was nearly over but he was "in an almost continuous state of hectic and feverish poetic activity, so much so that poetry seemed to be the only means by which he felt he could still hold on to life."³ In January 1964, when he heard of the death of Louis

MacNiece he wrote an elegy to mark the occasion ("Luww Maknīfa")\(^1\), then on 9/7/64 he composed "Fī Ghābat az-Zalīm"\(^2\), a poem pervaded by death where he begs, "The bullet of mercy, 0 God." On the fifth of the following month he wrote "Laylat Intīzār" and on 14/8/64 he composed "al-Mi‘wal al-Hājari\(^3\)", thereafter he wrote several introspective poems, some of which concerned his wife and his relationship with her.

The light had perhaps burnt low but it had not yet been extinguished and, still harassed by economic problems, as-Sayyāb made arrangements for a new collection, which had previously been refused by other publishers, to be published in Beirut under the title Shanāshīl Ibnat al-Galābī.\(^4\) Then, on 22/11/64, he wrote "‘Ukkāz fī l-Jahīm", having composed "Nafs wa-‘Abīr" on the tenth of the same month.\(^5\) Finally he composed another undated poem which, according to Fu‘ād Tāhā ‘Abd al-Jalīl (as-Sayyāb’s brother-in-law), was probably his last poem, called "Iqbal wa-l-Layl", in which he says to his wife,

> You endeared the twilights of life to me, caressing them with the day's radiance.

> Why do you close the door on me? Oh for the one who crosses the desert wastes,

> Who reaches the city as darkness spreads and the day passes away,

> And [finds] the gate closed, so he wanders aimlessly in the dark.\(^6\)

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1. Diwān, 1, p. 694.
2. Ibid., p. 704; quoted p. 706.
3. Ibid., p. 710 and p. 701 resp.
4. Dec. 1964; reproduced June 1965 at Dar at-Tall’a (Beirut).
6. Ibid., p. 718.
But even so he does not reproach her further and begs her to touch his wounds with love and tenderness for it is she, and not he, who will suffer in the future because

Your love has died in its forenoon,
While Time has folded up your wedding ring in the prime of your youth.  

Thus one of the greatest modern Arab poets completed his journey from the heady political commitment of his youth, through the political and social symbolism of his mature years and the physical and mental anguish of his later life, to this more personal commitment between two human beings. Like two of his favourite symbols, Sindibad and Odysseus, he had finally returned home.

Chronology of the works of Badr Shākir as-Sayyāb

* 10. Icbāl: 1965 (Beirut). 

* Published posthumously
Before embarking on the study of romantic poetry in Arabic literature it would be useful to indicate what exactly is to be understood by the term "romanticism" itself, both in the West and in the Arab lands. It is always difficult to decide exactly which literary elements are involved in any "period term"\(^1\), such as "classical", "realist" or "symbolic", but the case of romanticism is rendered particularly obscure because of the very nature of this literary ideology.

Romanticism in Europe was in no way confined to literature alone, but involved every aspect of the thought, philosophy and arts of most western European countries at the end of the eighteenth century and the beginning of the nineteenth, spreading later to America and eastern Europe. It was, in fact, a manifestation of the basic changes that were taking place in the philosophy and attitudes of society, replacing the norms and systems of the previous era. These changes in viewpoints had their roots as far back as the seventeenth century, when the medieval attitude towards existence, with its strict hierarchy and order, had been seriously questioned. During the following century this tendency to doubt and examine philosophical claims became more prominent and self-aware, until, finally, a more or less complete triumph was achieved over the universal ideals of the Neo-Classicists in the early years of the nineteenth century.

The "optimist" of the eighteenth century had taken it upon himself to prove that diversity, and even evil, was necessary within the framework of a good and rational universe, subject to the laws of probability, where the deliberate failure of any creature to realise a probable proposition made the universe incomplete, and therefore evil. It is obvious that such a mechanistic view of the universe leaves little room for the free will of any individual, or for any personal moral reaction to the experience of existence.

Such a philosophy may well have suited the social structure of feudal Europe but it was ill-suited to withstand the onslaught of the geographical and technological development which had taken place throughout the eighteenth century. For the thinkers of this era society "could no longer be measured against the concept of order and degree, or by the standards of a government fixed in a religious dispensation"\(^1\), so that many historians have claimed that the new romantic ideology which "became far more explicit and potent, in the later eighteenth century and was essentially antithetic to the tendencies of taste and thought dominant in the early part of that century"\(^2\), was caused neither by the French or the Industrial Revolution, nor by the rise of nationalism in Europe, but that these were rather concurrent consequences of a fundamental mutation in European society which might well be termed "individualism."

As the edifice of ruling presupposition crumbled, daring individuals began to formulate new theories which could "break the confines of

rules and limitations and move beyond what had already been crystallized\(^1\), and which allowed mankind "to discover the world of the spirit through the unaided efforts of the solitary soul."\(^2\) Such individualism brought about new conceptions of Universal Plenitude; diversity no longer implied order, it now implied a source of universal excellence, where the peculiar experience of each individual creature contributed towards the perfect nature of the whole. In such theories the ego attempts to assimilate the external, but the existence of an objective universe is also implied, as there can be no subjective existence without this.

These upheavals in philosophical preconceptions led, necessarily, to the rise of national, personal and racial idiosyncracies, as well as to more democratic forms of government and the insistence of the growing middle class upon personal effort. It also led to fundamental differences in society's attitude towards the arts, and especially towards literature.

The artistic criticism and taste of eighteenth century Britain had been moving slowly towards new ideals, but still adhered predominantly to mimetic theories of art, drawing heavily upon the classical principles of Aristotle, who had viewed art as an imitation of the material universe, although it should be emphasised that some eighteenth century critics in Europe had insisted that only painting and sculpture could truly imitate nature, while language could only copy it in sound and motion, and that literature was thus copying something deeper than every-day reality, the Fundamental Nature of Existence.

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Yet, although criticism itself tended to pay equal attention to the effect produced on the writer's audience, making the orientation one of work-audience, rather than work-universe, the Neo-classicist does in fact imitate reality, in as much as he idealises it by making it conform to the generally accepted universal truths of his time. The romantic, on the other hand, attempts to transcend the physical confinements of time and space, and in doing so break free from the accepted forms of Neo-classicism, allowing his formulae to relax and expand.

The essential nature of romanticism has been discussed at length over the last two centuries. Lovejoy, in his famous lecture on romanticism, claimed that the various romantic movements in Europe are so different and contain so few common features that the word has "ceased to perform the function of a verbal sign"¹, and that we should not talk of "romanticism", but of "romanticisms". This theory excites considerable interest in literary circles even today, although the claim of René Wellek, who attempted to refute Lovejoy's statement in 1949, also enjoys wide-spread popularity. In spite of his dislike of "period terms", Wellek feels that "there was really no misunderstanding about the meaning of 'romanticism' as a new designation for poetry."² Without going into details the most valid claim lies somewhere between these two extremes. Romanticism, as the literary manifestation of the philosophical and social trend towards "individualism", concentrated more upon the individual than the group, and this led to more emphasis

² Wellek, René, "The Concept of Romanticism in Literary History", op. cit., p. 17.
being placed on the personal creative imagination of the artist, so that each man tended to rely more heavily on the sincere expression of his own experiences and ideals, producing his own style of literature. But, although the elements of romantic creativity differed, not only from country to country, but also from author to author in what is normally seen as a historical or literary unit, certain common factors can be discerned, so that it would perhaps be useful to refer to a literary dictionary's definition of romanticism.

Here the difficulties of exact definition are re-iterated but the obvious general tendencies are accentuated. European romanticism is a movement of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries which marked the reaction in literature, philosophy, art, religion and politics from the Neo-classicism and formal orthodoxy of the preceding period... [It] tends to see the individual at the very centre of life and all experience, and it places him, therefore, at the centre of art, making literature most valuable as an expression of his unique feelings and particular attitudes... It places a high premium upon the creative function of the imagination, seeing art as a formulation of intuitive imaginative perceptions... It sees in Nature a revelation of Truth, 'the living garment of God'... Employing the commonplace, the natural and the simple as its materials; it

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seeks always to find the Absolute, the Ideal, by transcending the actual.¹

In the formal literary sense it is characterised by "the abandonment of the Heroic Couplet in favour of Blank Verse, the sonnet . . . and many experimental verse forms, [and by] the dropping of the conventional poetic diction in favour of fresher language and bolder figures."²

The most favoured forms of the romantic are the "lyric, especially the love lyric . . . the ballad . . . the sonnet, and the critical essay."³

Thus Wellek's claim that the "same conceptions of poetry and of the workings and nature of the poetic imagination, the same conception of nature and its relationship to man and basically the same poetic style, with a use of imagery, symbolism and myth which is clearly distinct from that of eighteenth century classicism"⁴ were to be found in European romanticism can be verified, although there were certain differences between romantics; as the German school, for instance, tended to lean more heavily towards the past and the medieval epoch than the British school, which was more involved in discovering the basic essence of man's spirit, while similar dissimilarities occurred among the other romantic groups of Europe and America, where romanticism showed itself in the works of Emerson, Poe and their contemporaries.

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The problems regarding the exact meaning of romanticism also occur in Arabic literature. H. A. R. Gibb has often been criticised for

2. Ibid., p. 466.
3. Ibid., p. 467.
describing the "literature of Arabia and Persia" as essentially "romantic", but this is in fact often due to a misunderstanding of his interpretation of this term. In his explanation of the differences between eastern and western literatures he says that oriental literature has

full, or even fuller, mastery of form, but it is rigid where Greek is various, and extravagant where Greek is severe. The classics achieved greatness by restraint and simplicity, the oriental weaves a laborious fabric of precious and obscure language, decorated with imagery often far-fetched and fantastic. The Greek appeals through beauty to the intellect, the Arab or Persian through richness of colour to the senses and the imagination . . .

Where the Muslim writer excels is in clothing the essential realism of his thought with the language of romance.

Only his comments on the appeal to the senses in Arabic literature are relevant to romanticism in the modern sense of the word, and from this statement and from the observation which he makes in the same chapter that The Thousand and One Nights and other such literature predisposed European "public taste for the reversion to the non-classical and medieval which goes by the name of the Romantic Movement"¹, it is

quite clear that Gibb was using "romantic" to denote literary forms closer to the romance literature of medieval Europe than the poetry of nineteenth century Britain, or even of German romantics, who employed a new concept of poetry which was symbolic, historical, mythological and dialectal, while relying heavily on the sincere expression of emotion.

However, it is not simply the transportation of such a literary term from culture to culture that can lead to obscurity. Prof. M. R. Faysal claimed that "Arabic literature belongs to one school, namely the romantic school"¹, but this necessarily implies emphasis on certain aspects of romanticism at the expense of other elements, especially the centrifugal force of modern romanticism, the sincere expression of the poet's emotions and ideals. Although several poets of the classical era may have introduced some of the factors normally viewed as romantic into their poetry, like Ibn ar-Rûmî, who gave an impression of sincerity and brilliant imagination in his poetry, or Abû Firās al-Ḥamdānî, who wrote haunting love lyrics, they were still restricted by the literary preconceptions of their society. Even the Ṣūfī poets, who were actually outwith the mainstream of Arabic poetry, could not be called romantic in the modern sense of the word.²

Romanticism, as a unique expression of the emotions and attitudes of the poet and the artistic formulation of these imaginative and creative psychological impulses, is actually restricted to the modern era in Arabic literature³, and resulted from the changes which took

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2. For further discussion of this see ‘Abbās, Iḥsān, Fann ash-Shī‘r (Beirut, 3rd ed., n.d.), p. 50.
3. Many Arab critics would agree with this statement. In Fann ash-Shī‘r Iḥsān ‘Abbās said, "We can only find a clear trace of a romantic school [in Arabic literature] in the modern period" (p. 51).
place in both literature and society towards the end of the nineteenth century, although their roots stretched back to Napoleon's invasion of Egypt in 1798. This brought the Arabs into contact with the technology and military strategy of contemporary Europe for the first time, not only through the French armies but also through association with the scientists and specialists whom Napoleon brought with him, and through the medium of French newspapers and books. The enterprising leaders of the Arab world were impressed by the technology and military prowess of their western opponents, and especially by their modern weapons, which had proved so effective against any Arab resistance. The "Founder of Modern Egypt", Muhammad 'Alī (1805-49), was greatly interested in developing Egypt and the Egyptian armed forces with the help of western technology and economic theories, and so encouraged study trips to Europe and set up a new educational system, closely linked with Europe, inviting western experts to instruct Egyptians in modern methods.

Such schemes had obvious cultural side-effects. The first Arabic printing press was brought to Egypt by Napoleon, and others were soon turning out myriad translations from European scientific treatises, but were soon publishing literary translations as well as newspapers, whose scope far exceeded the reporting of social and political affairs. Al-Muqtaṣaf came to Egypt from Lebanon in 1834 and soon enjoyed a circulation like that of al-Ahram, which had first appeared in 1876. Such periodicals obviously presented the poet or littératour with an audience which was wider than the limited court circles whose approval he was wont to seek, and which had received a different type of education, and this "eventually led to a less complicated [literary]
language and to a gradual diminution of archaic words in which Arab poets had revelled until then."¹

Such transformations in the educational system and the complementary changes in society, led to the rise of a new class in the Arab world, "made up of small landowners, men of industry and trade, civil servants, and those trained in the professions, like doctors, lawyers and mathematicians², who were seeking to make their mark on society at the expense of the ruling upper class. The comparatively sudden increase in this professional class, and its aspirations, led to friction with the traditional leaders of society, and this in turn resulted in a sharp division between the old aristocracy with its Islamic background and Ottoman social practice, and the new middle class with its western education and pseudo-European manners. Some prominent leaders, like Jamāl ad-Dīn al-Afghānī and Muḥammad ‘Abdūh, tried to root these new tendencies in Islamic soil, but these movements failed to furnish a clear alternative to the influx of European thought, and finally compromised themselves completely by becoming involved in the ‘Urabi revolt, which eventually provided the excuse the British had been waiting for to occupy Egypt.³

With western occupation or colonialisation the tendency to copy European models increased. European influence was first felt in Egypt but other areas of the Arab world, such as Lebanon and Syria, soon followed suit. In these parts the situation was further complicated by

the existence of large numbers of Christians within their boundaries, and by the many proselytising missions which set up foundations and educational institutions throughout the Arab lands. The American Presbyterians arrived in Lebanon in 1823 and were soon in close contact with the Greek Orthodox church in that country, and with the Freemasons, who exerted considerable influence on the students and graduates of the Protestant American College.\(^1\)

But colonialisation was the greatest humiliation for the Arabs, and encouraged feelings of frustration and alienation which lodged in the hearts of many of the young and enthusiastic élite, whose western education had taught them of freedom and democracy, although they saw little of such ideologies being put into practice in their colonial environment. Those countries which were under Ottoman control perhaps preferred their Muslim Turkish overlords to the Christian colonial powers, but they, like their brothers under European domination, also longed for freedom and self government. The Young Turk Revolt in 1908 raised their hopes, especially when the "Committee of Reform" published its recommendations for home rule for the Arab-speaking areas of the Empire in 1912, but the ensuing disappointment and the rise of Turkish nationalism only led to further despair and anger, which found its outlet in the Arab revolt of 1916\(^2\), which was to have far-reaching implications for Arab nationalism.

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1. For further details see Moreh, S., Modern Arabic Poetry: 1800-1970 (Leiden, 1976), p. 85-6 (Protestant links with Greek Orthodox Church) and p. 95 (influence of Freemasons on college graduates).
Such radical changes in society could not be without parallels in Arabic literature, which had been intimately linked with its environment throughout its history, to a greater or lesser degree. The new middle class of Arabic society, which owed its success to European methods and education, could not help but absorb certain artistic and literary tendencies in the course of their studies and travels, and, consequently, came to prefer a more purposeful literature which was closer to the concerns of Arab life at that time. The poets looked about themselves "and saw reactionism in society . . . apathy in poetry and apathy in the structure of society"\(^1\), and discovered that the state of their society and the state of Arabic literature were irrevocably connected, and called for changes in both.

However, mutations in society and literature are always gradual, and the Nahda, the artistic renaissance of Arabic society, had to counteract the stagnation of the Inhitafr, the Period of Decline, which had cast its shadow over Arabic letters for many centuries. The first tremblings of re-awakening showed themselves in the works of M. Sāmī al-Bārūdī, and then in those of Ahmad Shawqī and Ḥāfīẓ Ibrāhīm in Egypt, and Jamīl Ṣīdāq az-Zahawī, Ma‘rūf ar-Ruṣāfī and Mahdī al-Jawāhiri in Iraq, all of whom reverted to the old Arabic poetic models, hoping to recapture the greatness of the Golden Age of Arabic literature.

Although these poets did make some claims in favour of more sincerity in poetry and less archaicisms, and even played with some rhyme forms, as did az-Zahawī and ar-Ruṣāfī\(^2\), they did abide by the rules of poetic convention on the whole, and tended to write within

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1. Bullāṣa, ar-Rāmānīqīyya, p. 94.
the framework of the classical *qasida*. Yet what they did achieve was by no means negligible, for they breathed new life into the old styles by using themes and diction which had some continuity with the events of their day. The claim that

the classical poets found themselves surrounded by new events and voices calling for a new [type of] literature, but they repelled its echoes without letting these concepts infiltrate into their poems or [allowing them] to change their traditional attitude towards art and the artist

is true, but only to a point. These poets were forced to a degree of conformity in poetry, not only by their own respect for the great masters of the past, but also by the taste and requirements of their society. As has been mentioned, while a society slowly changes literature within that society also undergoes a transformation, and these poets were one of the principal factors in these developments. By their political and social poems they influenced the new élite of the Arab lands, who were increasingly conscious of national and social affairs, while their works also acted as mouthpieces for their communities on important issues, and it was this which necessitated adherence to those aspects of traditional poetry which had been formulated to meet the needs of oratorical poetry, which had often employed themes of social or political significance.

However, their introduction of new themes and language, their criticism and their literary essays were often more important than the poetry itself, because they called for a rebellion against the attitudes of the preceding eras towards poetry. Traditionally the sweetest poetry had been that which feigned most, but the Neo-classicists called for sincerity in poetry, and even for the truthful expression of personal experiences. Similarly the essence of poetry was seen traditionally as residing in the rhymes, metres and the other formal aspects of poetry, but these poets felt that its secret lay in something less tangible and more concerned with the affairs of the lives of men; that the quintessence of poetry was to be found in what was written by the poet rather than in the mechanical ingredients of his composition. With these claims they opened new vistas for the young poets of the next generation, who could learn and benefit from them, and then move the barriers further towards free-expression and metrical experiment.  

**Khalīl Muṭrān**

Most critics feel that the literary philosophy which followed immediately upon the footsteps of Neo-classicism was that of romanticism itself, although they disagree as to which poet was the first romantic. According to *Īsā Bullāṭa* "Jibran was the first great Arab romantic", but it is more probable that M. M. Badawi was correct in saying that this type of literary ideology started with what he calls the

"Pre-Romantics", who recognised the weaknesses and limitations of traditional poetry and sought to free it from some of the restrictions forced upon it, and placed Khalil Muṭrān (1872-1949) at the beginning of this stage, rather than second as did Bullāṭa.²

It was in the introduction to his Diwān, published in 1908, that Muṭrān elucidated what might well be termed his poetic manifesto, in which he claimed,

The author of this verse is not a slave to it, he is not driven by the necessities of metre or rhyme to say anything other than what he has intended to say. In it right sense is conveyed in correct and eloquent language... The author does not aim at the beauty of the individual line irrespective of whether or not it disowns its neighbour and quarrels with its fellows... rather he is concerned with the beauty of the line, both in itself and in its context, together with the whole structure of a poem, the arrangements of its lines, the harmony and concord of its ideas, beside the uncommonness of the imagination, the strangeness of the subject, and yet the conformity of all that to truth and its revelation of free, unshackled sensibility, minuteness and accuracy of description.³

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1. Badawi, M.A.P., p. 68.
2. Bullāṭa, ar-Rūmāntīliyā, p. 107: Muṭrān "was another romantic, but he was not as unrestrained by the ties of society in his literature as was Jibrān."
One of the most interesting facets of this statement is his insistence upon the autonomy of the creativity of the poet, who uses metre and rhyme as tools in the poetic process and does not subjugate himself to their control at the expense of his theme. His opposition to servile imitation of conventional poetry and themes had been exhibited as early as 1900 when he wrote, "Therefore, our poetry ought to represent our imagination and our feelings, and not their imagination and feelings [i.e. the Ancients], even if cast in their moulds and following their language"\(^1\), while, in later years, he announced that his poem "Nero", which consisted of 327 lines observing only one rhyme, had been written "to show to my Arabic-speaking brethren the need to follow different methods in order to keep pace with western nations in the progress which they have achieved in poetry and eloquence."\(^2\)

Basically Mu\(\text{\textr}an\) recognised that Arabic was a suitable medium for all sorts of artistic expression, and would be invaluably improved if the poets could be induced to break free from their conventional attitudes towards metre, rhyme and their reliance on the line as a single unit of meaning. As we have seen Mu\(\text{\textr}an\) did not believe that it was enough simply to carry a theme or a narrative on to the next line or lines, but felt that all the components of a poem had to be gathered together and arranged in a harmonious and pleasing manner. However he also saw that such changes in the internal form of a poem necessitated basic changes in the conventional tastes of the poet and his audience. Without loyalty to his own sensibility the individual

\[^{1}\text{ar-Ram\(\text{\textd}}\text{i}, Jam\(\text{\textl}\) ad-D\(\text{\texti}n\), Khalil Mu\(\text{\textr}an\): Sh\(\text{\texta}\)\text{'ir al-A\(\text{\textq}\)\text{\textr}ar al-\text{\texta}rabiyya (Cairo, n.d.), p. 300.}\]

\[^{2}\text{Quoted in Badawi, M.A.P., p. 80.}\]
could not, in Muṭrān's opinion, achieve his rightful stature as a poet. Such beliefs are, of course, typical of romantic theories, and Muṭrān remains true to them in his description of his own poetry, which he saw as the artistic expression of his own experiences and emotions. He saw poetic composition as a healer for his troubled spirit, and claimed that "he had written his poetry in order to relieve his soul in solitude"¹, for, he said, his poetry was "but the tears which I have shed, the sighs which I have heaved, and the fragments of life which I have dissipated, yet, by versifying them, I feel I have recaptured them."² Such claims are reminiscent of those of the European romantic poets, and especially of Wordsworth's "Preface to the Lyric Ballads" where he describes similar feelings, while Muṭrān also agrees with Wordsworth by laying emphasis on the "uncommonness of the imagination [and] the strangeness of subject"³, but there is no evidence of a definite link between the two poets, although we do know that Muṭrān admired both Victor Hugo and Alfred Musset, who held similar views.⁴

It is interesting to note that these calls for poetic unity and freedom from the chains of formal convention were adopted and implemented by later poets and literary schools, but, although Muṭrān claimed that his verse was "the poetry of the future, because it was the poetry of life, truth and imagination all at the same time"⁵, his poetry also demonstrated several traditional features. In actual

1. Quoted in Badawi, M.A.P., p. 72.
2. Quoted in ar-Ramādī, Muṭrān, p. 179.
3. The quote is from Muṭrān, and is quoted in Badawi, M.A.P., p. 70.
4. See Ibid., p. 81.
5. Quoted in 'Alwān, Tatāwur, p. 372.
point of fact he was aware of this and said, "[I compose] two types of poetry: the poetry which is required of me, like the panegyric, the elegy and such like . . . while the second type is the artistic poetry which [simply] occurs to me, although it seems as if I had chosen it." But the tension between the old and the new in his poems is actually caused by his poetic aptitudes and his environment, rather than by the fact that many of his poems were written because of social or political duty.

Although Ostle claims that Muṭrān’s lyrical and contemplative poetry has more in common with the "Romantic poetry of nineteenth century Europe than with the classical models of ‘Abbasid poetry"^{2}, he was also greatly influenced by the genius of al-Buḥtūrī and Abū Tamʿān, as well as by his mentor Ibrāhīm al-Ṭāwiṣā (1847-1906).^{3} His respect for these men of letters had obvious effects on his attitude towards language itself, for, although he never descended to the level of verbosity, he did strive to control his diction and language carefully, and this sometimes forced him to pedantry and the use of archaicisms. Likewise he tended increasingly to employ traditional metres and rhymes, although several of his earlier poems constitute some interesting examples of prose poetry (ṣ̲hiʿr al-mānṭūr) and strophic verse.^{4}

1. Quoted in Buhlāṭa, ar-Rūmāntī, p. 108; also ar-Raṣīfī, Muṭrān, p. 224-5.
3. For information on Muṭrān’s elegy on Ibrāhīm al-Ṭāwiṣā see Moreh, M. A. Poetry, p. 62.
Furthermore there is a definite conscious and reasoning element in his poetry which is clear from his constant refurbishing, which was caused by his desire "to please at the expense of [his] art, which sometimes forced Khalil Muṭrān to return several times to these qasīdas, until they were more beautiful and perfect." Indeed the rational component in his creative process cast its net wider than the narrow scope of poetic composition and influenced him so profoundly that he often "wrote it [i.e. a narrative] down in prose, [and] then came back to it and wrote it down in verse." He was also "constantly vigilant and self-critical, with the result that one feels that there is not enough spontaneity in his poetry to make him a thorough-going romantic. With the almost obsessive desire to observe the outward form of the language goes a fairly rigid adherence to the metres and rhymes of traditional Arabic verse." This is probably more prominent in his political and social poetry than in his more personal verse, because Muṭrān had little wish to upset people with poetry which broke with too many conventions. In 1933 he proclaimed, "I wanted to make innovations in poetry from the very beginning . . . but I was forced, by the circumstances which surrounded my development, not to surprise people with everything that stormed into my mind", and this perhaps highlights one of the principal reasons for the number of elegies on friends and famous people in his works, and his indirect or direct poetic statements about important events, as well

1. ar-Ramādī, Muṭrān, p. 262.
2. Ibid., p. 225.
3. Badawi, H.A.P., p. 82.
4. Quoted in ar-Ramādī, Muṭrān, p. 301.
as the numerous examples of epithalamia and prothalamia, which are often charmingly delicate and sensitive.

This latter genre of poetry is related closely to the verse for which Muṭrān is justifiably renowned, the lyric and the dramatic narrative. In fact Muṭrān was really the first modern Arab poet to return this type of poetry to a place of importance in Arabic literature, by uniting it with the poetic narrative and dramatic monologue in a skilful and original manner which "is perhaps the clearest instance of how he was influenced by European poetry." Many of these poems remind one of the European ballad because of his use of the rhyming couplet or strophic verse, with short metres, which do not always adhere to the "structure of the Arabic qasīda, but are in accordance with other poetic genres from Arabic poetry," as well as because of the expression of intimate meditation therein. Yet the personal nature and originality of his treatment of the lyric must not be overstressed, because he was basically a "precursor of this type of lyrical poetry, which was developed more fully by later poets of the Diwān and Apollo groups in Egypt . . . [and by] ar-Rāḥita al-Qalamiyya in New York." The significant difference between the traditional treatment of the lyric and that of Muṭrān lies in the communication of his thoughts and memories in direct language "which is pleasing in its simplicity

1. For details concerning the revival of lyrical poetry in modern literature see Hilāl, M. G., "Hal li-d-Dunyā Madhāhib Adabiyya?", al-Ādāb (January, 1961), p. 31-32 and 57-62, especially p. 58. See also Badawi, N.A.P., p. 78.
3. ar-Ramāḍī, Muṭrān, p. 157. See also Badawi, N.A.P., p. 78.
and lack of elaboration"\(^1\), and this is nowhere clearer than in his love poetry, which describes "the beloved, her charms and her virtues, while remembering the (time which they) passed (together) and the happiness of love."\(^2\) Although some might agree with Ostle that the generally nost\^-algic tone of these verses is drawn from the nasib\(^-\) convention, it is more liable to have been caused by the tragically unfulfilled love affair of his youth, which perhaps also accounts for the lack of sensuality in these works, and the idealisation of woman-kind. This is borne out by study of the first volume of his Diwan where there are innumerable verses of "deeply subjective love poetry of varying degrees of emotional intensity"\(^3\), in which he successfully combined the classical Arabic conventions with those of Europe by describing both the physical and spiritual beauty of the woman, often making them "martyrs of love, the victims of society and wicked men."\(^4\)

In a similar way he did not confine himself to pictorial description in his portrayal of nature, which he often seems to see as a door to the world of the spirit. While Jayyusi may be correct in saying that his objectivity in descriptive poetry seldom enters the realms of empathic relationships\(^5\), the emotional attitude of the poet is reflected in objects of nature, so that they take part in the human experience of the poet. But this does not mean that he falls into the depths of pathetic fallacy; nature remains objective but it

\(^2\) Bullata, ar-Rumantiqiya, p. 114.  
\(^3\) Badawi, N.A.P., p. 76.  
\(^4\) Moreh, N.A. Poetry, p. 61.  
\(^5\) See Jayyusi, Salma Khadra, Trends and Movements in Modern Arabic Poetry (Leiden, 1977), p. 59. For more precise details see Ibid., p. 73-76, and ar-Ramad, Mufran, p. 190-199.
partakes of the function of a spiritual or emotive image, where the poet and nature are equally valid. Indeed there are many fine poems where the poet's feeling for nature is intimately bound up with the depth of his passion, and where nature is minutely and accurately described in a mood which is independent of, although sympathetic to, the poet's theme and emotions, in language which is both masterful and intimate.

His treatment of love lyrics and his descriptions of nature often betray open romanticism, and include many of its main themes: "complete self-absorption, nostalgia, the spiritual appeal of nature, idealized unattainable love, together with the poet's power of sympathy evinced in the detailed and loving description" of nature, or "descriptions of children, their innocence, their agility, their pastimes and their loves . . . [in which he finds] ideals which society, tied by its . . . traditions and restrictions, has lost." The way in which Muṭrān utilised these themes and described objects and people was fundamentally different to the style of the neo-classicists, because Muṭrān sought to delve beneath the external appearance of things, and to show what he could discover of their essence and internal nature, rather than content himself with a portrayal of their shells. He also broke with tradition in his treatment of the narrative, employing oblique statements as opposed to the direct comment of the neo-classical poets, while also surprising his predominantly conventional audience by the "striking structural unity (of his narrative), its logical and emotional progression . . . its

1. Badawi, M.A.P., p. 76.
dramatic and epic quality despite its shortness . . . (and) its aesthetic disinterestedness or its impersonality."

Although opinions vary as to the sincerity of Muṭrān's poetry it is generally agreed that any expression of emotions or personal experiences was tempered by the demands of tradition and language. Muṭrān's real legacy to his successors lay in his introduction of "new themes and imagery, diction, figures of speech and forms in poetry"\(^2\), and in his demands for poetic and creative freedom, which, he believed, were necessary for the achievement of complete unity in a poem where the diction, imagery and metric structure all combined to produce a perfectly harmonious artifact, where no part or line could be removed without spoiling the nature of the whole.

It is interesting that "Muṭrān's innovation does not appreciably go beyond what he has achieved in the first volume of 1908"\(^3\), and that during his term as President of the Apollo group of poets he took little active part in their work, except for an occasional elegy on an old friend or public figure. Perhaps the opposition which he had had to face early in his career had discouraged him, as M. M. Badawi has suggested\(^4\), or perhaps he had achieved what he intended in the introduction to the first volume, having "prepared the way so that poets of his own time and after him might obtain the objectives to which he showed the way."\(^5\)

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1. Badawi, M.A.P., p. 79.
3. See Badawi, M.A.P., p. 82.
4. See Ibid., p. 84.
Another formative influence on the development of Arabic romanticism came from a group of poets who joined forces so as to propagate romantic theories, and who are normally called the Diwān group after their publications. This group consisted of ʿAbbās Maḥmūd al-ʿAqqād (1889-1964), ʿAbd al-Qādir al-Ẓāzīnī (1890-1949) and ʿAbd ar-Raḥmān Shukrī (1886-1958), who was the best poet of the three and is normally seen as the leader of the group, although he split with his two comrades after a violent argument in which al-Ẓāzīnī claimed that Shukrī was mad, in retaliation for the latter's criticism of the former's borrowings from English literature.

All three were undoubtedly deeply influenced by English literature and openly propounded the theories of nineteenth century European romanticism. In one of his many books, *Egyptian Poets and their Environment in the Last Generation*, al-ʿAqqād claimed that the younger generation of Egypt were intensely aware of English literature, but were also acquainted with that of Germany, Italy, Russia, Spain and classical Greece and Rome, and continued to name Hazlitt as their "guide in the field of criticism"¹, who had taught them the true nature of poetry and the other literary arts. According to al-ʿAqqād Carlyle was also influential, especially upon himself, and pronounced, "Carlyle is one of those few writers whom I avoid to write about because I know that my debt to them cannot be paid back in one, or

¹ See Badawi, *M.A.P.*., p. 87.
even ten articles."¹ Wordsworth, Shelley, Byron, Browning, Tennyson and Hardy, and the American romantics Emerson, Longfellow, Poe and Whitman are also mentioned, but it is clear that their real source was in fact Palgrave's *The Golden Treasury*, while it is also obvious that their knowledge of other European literatures, with the exception of French, was through the medium of English translations, rather than immediate acquaintance. In the same chapter al-‘Aqqād goes on to state that the "Egyptian school" did not indulge in mere imitations of English literature in their works, but studied it and then formed "its own opinion of each English author in accordance with its own independent judgement"², which could differ considerably from previous estimations.

However the *Dīwān* group was by no means ignorant of its Arabic heritage because of their literary education, and indeed its influence was probably stronger on their poetry than any external motivation, although it proved less so in their criticism. When talking of the Arab poets who had influenced this school al-‘Aqqād cited "al-Mutannabbi, al-Ma‘arrī, Ibn ar-Rumî, ash-Sharīf ar-Râfî, Ibn Ḥamdîs and Ibn Zaydûn"³, from which it is clear that they tended towards these poets, whose works they quoted, rather than towards the earlier masters of Arabic literature. In spite of al-‘Aqqād's bitter criticism of the "Egyptianized Turks"⁴ and of Ahmad Shawqî (1868-1932) in particular, this school

². Badawi, M.A.P., p. 87.
³. See Moreh, M. A. *Poetry*, p. 72.
⁴. See Ibid., p. 71.
did show respect for al-Bārūdī (1839-1904), and indeed those verses of al-‘Aqqād which describe the remains of ancient Egyptian civilisation bear a strong resemblance to such themes as used by the neo-classicists, especially in their tendency towards external representation.

Curiously, the stature and literary influence of Mujrīn is all but ignored, despite the fact that his literary theories had much in common with those of the Diwān group, as they both stem from the belief that literature should be the creative unification of various heterogeneous impulses into a single homogeneous form. The poetry, or literature, resulting from this process should also be organically complete, not only in rhyme and metre but in all its aspects, so that any removal or misplacement is detrimental to the artistic perfection of the work. This is a distinct departure from classical tradition, where the line was autonomous in form and content, and could often be deleted or exchanged with another without causing any damage to the poem as a whole.

Such theories help to minimise the control of the intellect over poetic creation and facilitate personal expression, which is indispensable for any poetry claiming to be the product of some deep emotional experience, which is both subjective and private. For Shukrī poetry was made up of

words which arise from the soul, polished and aflame.  
But, as an emotion can facilitate the poet’s expression, its force can also compel him to silence, and, because of this, the remembrance of the emotion and the contemplation thereof becomes poetry; that is, it is

the remembrance which recalls the emotion and the contemplation which brings it back to life. But it is the soul, when it overflows with poetry, which produces the various characteristics and emotions of a single poem.¹

It is thus not surprising that Shukrî felt that the true poet could only justify his existence by writing poetry, and that poetry was, in fact, his very essence. The creations of such a soul should therefore be intensely personal, and perhaps the works of Shukrî himself are a good example of this, as from his second volume of poetry onwards, there is "undeniably a growing concentration on the poet's inner world, [and] his subjective and spiritual experiences."²

Likewise the subjective element was prominent in the poetry and criticism of al-Māzīnî, who believed that the end of poetry was emotion, and that the poet should express his doubts, sufferings and any other strong sentiment, in such a way as to produce this emotion in his reader. The romantic despair and langour which is present in al-Māzīnî's works also infiltrates into that of al-‘Aqqād, who exclaimed in his poem, "Outpourings", "My verse is my tears!"³ However, in al-‘Aqqād's case, these tears must have had a therapeutic effect, because he also claimed that poetry was a blessing from God, saying, "indeed it is only through its gate that happiness enters the hearts."⁴ Yet, despite his emotive conception of poetry, there is a growing

3. See Ibid., p. 112.
intellectuality in his verse which does little to enhance its charm. In fact all of the Diwān group showed an inclination towards a moralistic stance to one degree or another, and even Shukrī fell victim to this, often reducing his verse to a "string of moral observations and meditations"\(^1\), perhaps because of his career as an educationalist, or, as is more likely, due to the increasing domination of his belief that poetry should raise the soul above the plane of baseness and crudity.

Al-‘Aqqād and al-Māzinī also agreed with the relativist notion of art as propounded by the European romantics, who had insisted that art was the material expression of an artist’s milieu, or of the spirit of his age, and that a poet, by voicing his own hopes and frustrations, reflected the optimism or the malaise of his era. Indeed the poetry of all three revealed something of the general alienation and uncertainty of a generation who were poised somewhere between the values of the east and those of the west. In the hope of redressing the balance al-‘Aqqād and al-Māzinī called for a literature which would be "humanistic, Egyptian and Arabic"\(^2\), believing that it was necessary "to imitate the past and join with it, not only in the sphere of Arabic [literature], but also in the western literary sphere, so that the scope of [their] poetry could be expanded."\(^3\)

They claimed, however, that it was not absolutely essential that a poet should be directly concerned with current social and political

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2. The translation is from Moreh, M. A. Poetry, p. 71. The original was from ad-Diwan, vol. II, p. 45, and was (أدب) إنساني مصري عربي.
events in his poetry, because it was not his task to make propaganda or public denouncements. The duty of the poet was to teach us "to love beauty" and to "rebel against oppression" by his artistic creativity, and he did not have to be a perfect example of his age to do so: "The representation of the environment is not a prerequisite of poetic genius, for the environment of ignorance and imitation is represented by ignorant and imitative poets, while the distinguished poet may be at variance with his environment." But the true poet should always be sincere about his own views and emotions, and not attempt to copy those of others in a lifeless exercise.

While sincerity is required, exact adherence to detail in description and emotional expression is not always necessary or, indeed, desirable, because the imagination is not shackled to reality and may even surpass it. According to al-Māzīnī beauty created by the imagination is often superior to that of the corporeal world, because "poetry [is capable of] making ugliness into beauty, and [of] increasing beauty . . . pouring forth springs of safety and alarm, and joy and pain." This was also true for Shukrī who found imagination to be "both the Paradise and the Hell of our dreams", as well as illuminating eternal and absolute truths, while the poet's vision is either "a source of bliss" or a "source of terror." As has already been mentioned the Diwan school believed that the end of poetry was the production of emotion, thus transporting the poet's audience "into a state of ecstasy against their will, mixing his emotions and feelings

1. See Semah, D., Four Egyptian Literary Critics, p. 11.
3. See Badawi, M.A.P., p. 94.
with theirs"¹, by means of the "imagination or a stream of ideas directed by emotion."² But what of the man who experiences these emotions, that is the poet himself?

For the Diwan school the poet, although an ordinary mortal, possessed a heightened and more receptive sensibility, which made it possible for him to transmute his emotions into a poetic form. But he was, nevertheless, misunderstood by and alien to his society. In the work of these poets we hear of the sensitive man of suffering who tells of his pain in his verse. For al-Mazini the poet was "a man whose exquisite sensibility distinguishes him from... the rest of his community"³, while al-‘Aqqad felt that what "distinguishes a poet from the rest of man is the strength, depth and wide range of his feelings, and his ability to penetrate into the reality of things"⁴, and that this was due to some physical or mental disability, some "illness" which could be discovered in his texts.⁵ Like the other two poets Shukri saw the artist as someone separated by invisible barriers from his society, and described the poet as:

At home and amidst his own people he lives like a sad stranger,

Nought in his heart but love, sorrow and anger against these untrusted times.⁶

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1. See Badawi, M.A.P., p. 90.
2. See Ibid., p. 90.
4. See Ibid., p. 90.
5. For details see Semah, D., Four Egyptian Literary Critics, p. 206-7.
6. For translation see Badawi, M.A.P., p. 95.
The seeds of the attitude of the later romantics towards the poet are clearly visible in these descriptions of the poet but the poet has not yet become the voluntary outcast seeking refuge in the forests, although he does suffer from alienation amongst a people who do not recognise his great message. This was perhaps one of the reasons for their inability to produce poetry which was truly Egyptian, and to which every Egyptian could relate. "They looked at it [i.e. their society] from above, and considered themselves the judges and champions of the right values of literature"\(^1\), which were basically western and only partially assimilated, and this led to a sharp dichotomy between their critical theories and their poetry.

There can be no doubt that the Diwan school were less gifted poets than their older contemporary, Mufrân, whose poetry was to prove so influential in the critical and poetic output of the younger poets, and especially that of the Apollo group of Abû Shâfî (1892-1955). The Diwan group tried to put their literary theories into practice so as to set an example for other poets but, although they were partly successful, they found this difficult because of the classical tastes of their society, and even because of their own education in the classical literature of the Arabs. The strain between the old and the new, and between the east and the west, is easily discovered in their attempts to introduce new metrical forms.

Their stance on versification was, like that of Mufrân, somewhat ambivalent, lying between that of the neo-classicists and that of the romantics. Their calls for new rhyme structures which could "prepare the way for dramatic and narrative poetry"\(^2\) remained, for the most

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1. Moreh, M. A. Poetry, p. 73.
2. Ibid., p. 75.
part, theoretical in their works, in which they tended to employ the classical monorhyme more than any other form, perhaps because they found it difficult to reconcile the strange sounds and rhythms of these new forms with their classical background, in spite of their acquaintance with European literature. The same is true of their treatment of poetic diction. Although all three were aware that the language of poetry had to be simplified still further they insisted on its continuity and precision, and claimed, in the words of al-‘Aqqād, that an error could only be excused when

the fault was better, more beautiful and fulfilling than the correct version . . . For we must remember that the [Arabic] language was not created today so that we can create its [grammatical] rules and bases according to our wishes, and that progress can only occur in languages which have a past and [grammatical] rules and bases.¹

Perhaps it was their pride in, and awareness of, these linguistic and grammatical fundamentals that forced them to employ archaicisms, derived from their ‘Abbāsid masters like al-Mutanabbī, while their knowledge of and liking for English literature led them to borrow certain words and phrases which proved difficult and obscure when removed from their native environment, or encouraged them to introduce new imagery which, like their diction, often required explanatory footnotes, in the fashion of their neo-classical predecessors.

1. He made this statement in his introduction to al-Ghirbāl of Mikhail Naimy (Cairo, 1923), p. 12.
Al-‘Aqqād’s descriptions of landscape were also reminiscent of the neo-classical era, and never more so than in his treatment of ancient Egyptian monuments, which bear a striking resemblance to similar exercises carried out by the neo-classicists. However, one poem on Karnak is less inclined to such external portrayal and leads the poet to the sort of subjective meditation which had been seen in some of Muṭrān’s works, and which had been popular amongst European romantics. Indeed, al-‘Aqqād was capable of producing fine meditational poetry, especially when birds were involved, often expressing an empathic relationship which is both effective and interesting. But his more normal tendency was to see nature as a reflection of his own emotions and attitudes, and to treat animals as symbols for his own feelings of alienation in a society which was incapable of recognising his genius.

The same is true of Shukrī’s poetry, in which nature played an important part as a background for his subjective emotions and attitudes. His natural descriptions are usually melancholy and dark, and even when capable of liberating the poet from his despair and sorrows, nature is seldom a healing influence and is generally used to create the picture of some being who has not been accepted as part of his own community. Al-Māzīnī also used nature as a back-cloth for his own philosophies and emotions, being particularly fond of its more sombre and wilder aspects, where he superimposed effective and violent images which are often quite frightening, and remind the reader of the sublime imagery of eighteenth century English literature. In less emotional moods the picture of nature conjured up by the poet is probably more in line with the description and imagery of the Jāhilī convention in the section of the ḥaḍīṣ where the ḥāḍīṣ (remains of the encampment) were described.
Like the European romantics of the nineteenth century nature often provided a refuge for the demented lover searching for comfort from his emotional turmoil and wounds in the poetry of al-‘Aqqād and al-Māzinī, although this is less prominent in Shukrī's verse.

Although al-‘Aqqād's works are generally less melodramatic in tone, he too complains of the disappointments, doubts and frustrations of love, in a quiescent manner which is "as disturbing as the equally muted poetry of Hardy"¹, who was greatly admired by al-‘Aqqād. While al-‘Aqqād's love verses are often what one would expect of a poet strongly influenced by European romantic literature, those of Shukrī, although expressed in the conventional classical manner of complaint, are intensely subjective and personal. One is repeatedly confronted by the disquieting image of the poet encountering or kissing the corpse of a dead woman, and sometimes, as in "Women in Life and in Death", the expression is obviously diseased:

They rose, swaying in their clothes in the dark nights,
After they had become food for the worms.

They came in the dark, and struck the eyes of the beholders with disease,
Echoing the shrieks of owls till the air grew sick.²

Curiously he also wrote poems in which the beloved is idealised, and possesses charms and beauty far beyond those of this world, and often seems to be divine:

I saw in a dream your face which I adore  
Crowned with the stars of the night.¹

Such lines border on the spiritual and it is interesting that there are also examples of spiritual attitudes towards death among his love poems, where the loved one is sometimes likened to the grave:

Would I were a dead man and you were my tomb  
There would then be neither longing nor despair  
Neither prohibition or reprimand.²

Perhaps these seeming contradictions can be partly explained by the following statement: "By love poetry I do not mean the poetry of lust or sexual passion, but that of spiritual love which rises above all descriptions of the body except those which reveal the workings of the soul." Nor is the outward manifestation of beauty of paramount importance because the beauty of "a body, a flower or a river... [the] night and stars... the beauty of the soul or character, an attitude or an event, or the beauty of the images created by the human mind"³ are all equally valid. Clearly the women in Shukri's poetry are neither glorified for their external shape, nor damned, but are described according to the poet's reaction to what he believes to be their genuine character, rather than their physical charms.

Likewise it is hardly surprising that Shukri composed many verses propounding his love of beauty, often worshipping it as did

1. See Badawi, K.A.P., p. 100. From the poem "The Sought Beauty".  
2. See Ibid., p. 102. From the poem "Would we were".  
his erstwhile colleague al-Māzinī, who found the beauty of the imagination superior to reality. Al-‘Aqqād also refused to accept that exact descriptive precision was necessary for poetry to be sincere, and that sincerity in literature was the elegant and sophisticated artistic combination of factual information "as delineated by characters and figures"\(^1\), because truth was the source of beauty and was revealed in "the sincerity of the emotion [conveyed by the poet in a way free from affectation] and sham"\(^2\), and not by a strict adherence to external reality. In fact al-Māzinī was praised by al-‘Aqqād for such sincerity in his verse, which included a large number of poems in which the poet expressed his suffering and loneliness in love and in life generally, and re-affirmed his devotion to poetry and his desire for death, themes which were partly personal and partly a reflection of the contemporary state of Egyptian society.

All three agreed that the whole of creation could furnish material for poetic composition and this extended even into the realms of the supernatural. Al-‘Aqqād was drawn to the supernatural and wrote several poems concerning devils and other unnatural beings, perhaps under the influence of English literature\(^3\), but Shukrī's inclination to the kingdom of the unknown was far more deeply seated: "In my childhood, I was very superstitious, seeking the company of old women to hear stories about the supernatural to the extent that their stories filled every corner of my mind, which became a huge world teeming with magic and demons."\(^4\) Indeed the supernatural became one of the major

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2. See Ibid., p. 10.
3. See Badawi, M.A.P., *., p. 112-3 for further details.
4. See Ibid., p. 93.
themes of his poetry, along with meditations on al-majhūl (the unknown), a word which was to become one of the linguistic mainstays of romantic poetry and theories. These verses intimate a profound fascination with the unknown and intangible areas of the mind and the soul, but are sometimes marred by an unfortunate moralistic tone.

From the preceding survey it is clear that this group, while recognising the need for new developments in Arabic poetry, were incapable of implementing their literary theories successfully, so that "the romanticism of the Diwān group was immature. Their perception of reality remained hybrid. There was a hiatus between what they thought a poet should be, and what he actually was in their practices."1 Although it is extremely doubtful that Moreh was correct in his claim that "the whole of this school was engaged in destroying the poetic heritage of the Arabic qaṣīda, as it was practised by conservative poets . . . They destroyed, but gave no clear idea of what they intended to put in its place, and they failed to put their own, novel theories into practice"2, it is true that this school did not succeed wholly in complementing its theories with their verse. What they did achieve, however, was not mere iconoclasm, because, through their theories, they prepared the Arabic-speaking nations for a new type of literature, in which different attitudes towards the poet, his imagination and his sensibility were implicit, as were basic changes in literary tastes concerning the purely formal aspect poetry, and literature generally.

Perhaps the real contribution of the Diwan group to modern Arabic literature lies in the field of literary criticism, because "it does contain some of the best practical criticism produced in Arabic in the first half of the century"¹, and their literary theories exerted some influence on later poets. However, they chose to minimise the literary influence of Mufrân, who, unlike the Diwan group, had succeeded in producing lyrical, narrative and dramatic poems in accordance with his literary theories, even if he had been restrained by his classical education and his desire not to shock society, and who was to prove a profound influence on Abû Shâdî and the other members of the Apollo school. Perhaps al-Mazînî pin-pointed the cause of their failure when he confessed,

My literary production at that time [i.e. when he was writing poetry] was purely theoretical, or rather it was a literature depending on books and deriving only little from life, because I had not full experience of it . . . [My poetry] was not a manifestation of my heart responding to the wants which stirred it . . . For this reason, my literary production at that time was mostly studies based on reading only and verse which does not represent the true nature of my soul.²

It is noteworthy that al-Mazînî was to become "one of the greatest humourists and masters of ironic styles in modern Arabic prose"³, and

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¹ Badawi, M.A.P., p. 89.
² See Moreh, M.A. Poetry, p. 77.
³ Badawi, M.A.P., p. 106.
al-'Aqqād one of the most respected literary critics, while Shukrī, who had accused al-Māzīnī of plagiarism and broken with both of his colleagues, remained a respected poet who has become "perhaps one of the most fascinating and complex personalities in the history of modern Arabic poetry."¹

Another factor in their inability to substantiate their theoretical claims with poetic facts was their refusal to break loose from the eloquence of Arabic literature, while trying to cast away the traditional language and imagery of Arabic poetry, which was rich in associations and connotations. The fact that another literary school of the same era managed to bring about revolutionary developments in their poetry by exploiting the traditional and modern trends of both European and Arabic literature to their best advantage, without experiencing the tensions which "split their [i.e. the Diwān] personality between two conflicting forces: their feelings and tastes, which were Arabic, and their personal vision, theories and ideas"², which were predominantly European, would seem to vindicate this claim. This school was the Mahjar, a group of Arab poets who had emigrated to the U. S. A., who were mostly Christian, and who received a lot of assistance from the Diwān school, who published and praised their works, making them available to the Arabic literary public, whose tastes had been subtly prepared for such literature by the polemics and critical studies of the latter.

¹. Badawi, M.A.P., p. 92.
². Moreh, M. A. Poetry, p. 72.
al-Mahjar ash-Shami

Although resident in the United States the poets of al-Mahjar ash-Shamālī were in fact a geographical and cultural extension of the life and literature of Lebanon and Syria, where they had grown up and become accustomed to certain traditions, and political and cultural circumstances. Furthermore their native language was Arabic, and their use of it in their literature meant that they had to succumb to the influences of poetic tradition, directly or indirectly, and were forced "to join with its spirit, and submit to its control . . . [so that much of] the rhetorical residue [found] in their metaphors and similes were derived from their homeland and our Arabic language."¹ This is particularly clear in the case of Abu Mādi (1889-1957) who had had a solid grounding in the intricacies of the Arabic language and its prosody, and in its literature generally, which may have stood him in good stead in maintaining his own poetic personality after coming into contact with Jibrān. His earlier works were traditional and contained several poems of public interest couched in the declamatory language of the classical tradition, but this tone underwent a gradual transformation until his poetry became quieter and almost philosophical.

The Ayyūbyyāt of Rashīd Ayyūb (1872-1941) also exhibited several neo-classical features, such as the use of long and sedate metres, traditional hyperbole, rhetorical phrases and imagery, and genres such as the elegy and the panegyric, often in the style of one

¹. Dayf, Dirāsāt, p. 163.
of the great classical poets. However contact with Jibrān led to the literary domination of the latter, so that Ayyūb's poetic expression, apart from his nostalgia for the east which is typical of the poetry of the Mahjar, became an artificial artistic pose.

Their Christian milieu was probably the most effective influence upon the works of the Mahjar. Of the ten poets, who came together to form ar-Rābi'at al-Qalamīyya, eight were Greek Orthodox and two were Maronites, while Amin ar-Ribānī (1876-1940) was a Catholic, but not a member of Arrabitah. Most of them had been educated in sectarian schools, where they had been introduced to their Christian Arabic heritage, and to the Arabic translations of American and European Protestant hymns, which often employed European rhyme forms, and might have appeared even before the official date, 1885. This was also true of the Christian poets who emigrated to Egypt, but, whereas they found it necessary to curb this influence because of a society which "venerated its literary tradition and poetic heritage . . . [and obliged them] to serve prevailing literary taste in order to survive and to be accepted" their Christian compatriots in the Americas could exercise literary freedom and carry out experiments which would have been unacceptable in the east, although the poets in Latin America found their environment more restrictive.

1. In his book Khalil Gibran: His Life and His Works (Beirut, 1965), p. 155, Mikail Naimy said that it was agreed that the English rendering of ar-Rābi'at al-Qalamīyya should be Arrabitah, and this will be used henceforth.
2. For further details see Moreh, M. A. Poetry, p. 85-86.
3. For discussion see Ibid., p. 24-26.
4. Ibid., p. 82.
The main elements of the literature encouraged by western missionary activity in Lebanon and Syria were orientated towards simplicity so as to facilitate the expression of profound religious beliefs, and thus the emphasis was placed squarely on simple diction, drawn either from the Bible or from language traditionally viewed as unpoeitic although widely used in the colloquial, and on clarity rather than rhetorical elegance, but always within the bounds of grammatical correctness. Apart from this there was also the Protestant Arabic version of the Bible which influenced this generation, and especially those educated in the Russian missionary schools, which purchased 7,000 copies in one year so that Greek Orthodox children might "be taught to read Word of God." The most favoured parts of this Bible seem to have been the "Book of Psalms", "The Sermon on the Mount" and other lyrical chapters from both the Old and the New Testaments.

The Mahjar poets studied this literature carefully and believed that "they flowed directly from this literary heritage, and that they were able to develop and refine it largely through the direct influence of western literature, and through the works of the poets and writers who [had] preceded them." As has been mentioned many of these poets had encountered western literature and ideologies in their schools in the east before they emigrated, and, indeed, several, like Mikhail Naimy (b. 1889), Nasīb 'Arīğa (1887-1946) and 'Abd al-Masīh Ḥaddād (1881-1950), had attended the Russian Teachers' Training College in Nazareth, or, like Naimy, travelled abroad to

1. See Moreh, M. A., Poetry, p. 86.
2. See Ibid., p. 88-91. For examples of the influence of the Protestant hymns, see Ibid., p. 91-6.
3. Ibid., p. 102.
finish their education.¹ This type of education tended to be anti-
traditional, so that the pupils were often more concerned with western
literature and its traditions than those of Arabic, Christian or
otherwise. For example Naimy's verse is often contemplative and
deeply concerned with mystical questions of conscience and pantheistic
belief in a manner which was particularly unusual at that time, and
which he attributes to the fact that his style was not "purely Arabic,
because European models preponderated, and especially [those of]
Russian [literature]."² Like 'Arîd had a great deal of respect for
the poetry of Tyutchev and even translated some of his poetry.³

Many have claimed that the romanticism of American poets like
Thoreau, Longfellow, Emerson and Whitman had a strong formative
influence upon this group⁴, but it should be emphasised that this was
more obvious in the works of Jibrân, and in their metrical innovations
than in their themes or the other formal aspects of their compositions,
and that the stamp of such romanticism was soon blended with
prevailing Arabic influences so that although "the two tendencies,
the east and the west, continued to have an effect on their productions,
their heads and their spirits were still firmly fastened to our
temples and idols [i.e. those of Arabic literature]."⁵ Actually,
these poets were producing poetry according to personal criticism

¹. See Badawi, M.A.P., p. 185.
³. See Badawi, M.A.P., p. 194.
⁴. For example see Ibid., p. 180; and 'Alwân, Taṭawwur, p. 384.
⁵. Ḍayf, Dirâsât, p. 165. The literal translation of ʿa‘nâq would be
"necks", but I have chosen the word "head" as being more
comprehensible in English.
and literary inclinations, drawn from diverse sources, irrespective of geographical location or religious persuasion, and according to certain common literary aims.

By their very circumstances in the U. S. A. the poets of Arrabitah could afford to break out of the confines of Arabic literary tradition, because they relied neither on the support of a patron nor that of a specific audience with preconceived tastes. They wanted to give a new lease of life to Arabic poetry by freeing it from the overbearing pre-occupation with verbal and formal skill, and by creating a new type of poetry which would be "distinguished primarily by keen sensibility and subtle thought", and would express the spirit of their generation. Arrabitah was not a "regularly constituted society" but rather an "esprit de corps" made up of certain contributors to as-Sā'īḥ, the semi-weekly magazine established by ʿAbd al-Masīh Ḥaddād, so as to encourage certain literary forms. Discussing these targets Naimy proclaims,

The literature which we esteem is that which draws its nourishment from the soil of life, its light and its atmosphere... the man of letters whom we respect is the one who is endowed with delicate sensitivity, precise cognition and extensive insight... and with the ability to express the impressions which life leaves on his soul...

As for our endeavours to encourage a new spirit in literature, we do not intend thereby to sever

2. For details see Naimy, Kahlil Gibran, p. 157; and for quotes.
every connection with the ancients . . . [but the only result that we] can see in slavishly imitating them is the death of our literature . . . So our [wish to] protect our literary existence has forced us to depart from them for [the sake of] our present needs and the requirements of our future,¹

for although we recognise that to revere them is "a great honour . . . we must be true to ourselves if we would be true to our ancestors."²

From this it is clear that the members of Arrabitah also advocated an expressive literature, which would draw its inspiration from life itself and convey feelings and events in the most suitable and effective literary style. The classical attitude of the Arabs towards poetry was obviously unsuitable for such literature within the restrictions of inherited tradition, so the Mahjar were forced to adopt and invent new forms to suit their purpose.

One of the most recurrent juxtapositions in the literature of the Mahjar is that of the rhymester (an-Nazzām) and the poet, the former often being applied pejoratively to some of the contemporary poets of the east, who were, in the opinion of the Mahjar, more interested in metrical and grammatical jugglery than in the production of a literature equal to that of the poets of the Jāhiliyya or the 'Abbāsid era, or to that of Europe. In al-Jadwil Abu Mādī separated himself from all such poets and belle-lettrists who did not attempt

² Naimy, Kahlil Gibran, p. 156.
to write sincere literature by stating categorically, "You are not of my party if you regard poetry to be nothing more than words and metres. Our paths will never cross and there is nothing more between us."¹ For the Mahjar generally the poet had to cease to be ash-shā'ir an-nadīm, the convivial poet, and take up his rightful place as a spiritual leader or a poet-prophet², rather like the Kāhin (soothsayer) of the Pre-Islamic era. Such a stance would, of course, have been impossible for a Muslim because of the Prophet's injunctions against and condemnation of poets who adopted this role, and because of the divine nature of the Qur'ān, and the Muslims' veneration for its literary eloquence. We have already seen how the adīh, according to Arrabitah, was a man possessed of extraordinary sensitivity and insight, but in practice their claims exceeded this view, so that Jibrān described the poet as "an angel sent down by the gods to teach man divine things."³

Although Naimy did not go as far as this he attributes many faces to the poet. He is

a prophet, a philosopher, a musician and a priest.

He is a prophet because he sees, with his spiritual eye, what cannot be seen by every mortal; a painter because he can mould what he sees and make it audible

¹. See Badawi, M.A.P., p. 190.
³. See Badawi, M.A.P., p. 182.
in beautiful forms of verbal imagery, and a musician because he hears harmonious sounds when we only hear roaring and hubbub . . . And, lastly, the poet is a priest because he serves a god, who is Truth and Beauty. This god appears to him in various guises and differing circumstances, yet he knows him wherever he sees him, and offers up praises to him wherever he feels his spirit and his presence.¹

This poet cannot compose verse according to his own inclinations and whims, because he can "only take the pen in his hand when forced by some internal motivation, over which he has no control . . . But he is in complete control when he sits down to shape forms for his feelings and concepts from phrases and rhymes, because he chooses them as he likes."²

The true essence of poetry is emotion and personal attitudes, because both "poetry and prose must be evaluated according to the human strength therein, be it external or internal, and not according to the dexterity or ingenuity of its verbal and interpretative refinement."³ Although poetry should satisfy man's need for music and beauty in all things it should also fulfill his need to "express all the psychological factors which beset us [in life]", while providing us with "a light which may guide us in life; and this guiding light is none other than the light of truth — the truth

2. Ibid., p. 87. See also Nijland, Mikhā'īl Nu'aymah, p. 88.
which [we find] in our souls."¹ In providing sustenance for these needs poetry is the "friend of mankind from the very beginning, and develops with him from the cradle until the hour of his death"², while also facilitating both self-awareness and mutual understanding so that the poet can "extend the fingers of his inspiration to the covering of your hearts and your thoughts, lift one side of it and turn all of your attention upon what is hidden beneath."³ From this it is clear that poetry is a complete magister vitae for Naimy, and indeed for all the Mahjar, but it is also given an almost divine existence by him: "It is one, immeasurable, indivisible and unvariable, because the origins of poetry are life ... But, like life, poetry has many forms, colours and gradations."⁴ Furthermore, it is practically autonomous as it is "the spiritual essence [which] extends until its extremities touch the extremities of the essence of the world"⁵ and unites all diversity therein.

Such theories are clearly romantic and influenced by similar western ideas, but they have been assimilated into a personal literary ideology, subject to other psychological and physical factors. According to Jibrān poetry was "the incarnation of a divine spirit born of a smile that revives the heart or a single sight that brings tears to the eyes."⁶ While this somewhat melodramatic attitude is obviously exaggerated, the poetry of the Mahjar was often a verbal

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2. Ibid., p. 89.
3. Ibid., p. 103.
4. Ibid., p. 128.
5. Ibid., p. 78.
6. See Badawi, M.A.P., p. 182.
manifestation of profound and genuine feelings, and especially those of alienation and strangeness.

Unlike their compatriots in the south, al-‘Uqba al-Andalusiyva (The Andalusian League), who could integrate with a more traditional society, the poets of the Northern Mahjar found themselves in a modern and technological age, very different to the environment in the lands of their birth. Most of them found it necessary to make their living in this society but could not become part of it, or even sympathise with it, and this led to overwhelming homesickness and a desire to return to a simpler and more idealised way of life in the east, which was, according to them, closer to nature and more spiritual than the petty materialism of the U. S. A. and the west.

‘Arīga's poetry is full of condemnation for the west's excessive interest in material matters, and of the loneliness and isolation resulting from lack of communication and understanding, as is the verse of Abū Māği, which has a mood of eternal ennui and a curious restlessness to it, which seem to stem from his belief that the poet, although possessed of extra-sensory vision capable of guiding mankind through life, is ignored by his community, while his prophecy and advice are rejected.

This sense of rejection resulted in literary and artistic individualism, so that much of their poetry is concerned with "the crisis of the individual alienated within his society . . . preaching to the deaf ears of his fellow men in a corrupt, inhuman society"¹, and with the beauty and simple sincerity of their native lands. In

verse of most of these poets Lebanon or Syria remained an idealised social and geographical entity, although for Jibrân it "gradually metamorphosed in his imagination into a metaphysical homeland"\(^1\), a symbol of a more ideal human society, rather than a description of Lebanon as he saw or remembered it. If you scrutinise their poetry about al-\(\text{Ghāb}\) (the Forest) "you will find that it is really an [impulsive] gasp of love for [their] homeland, which is hidden from their sight although the clamour of intoxication still resounds in their hearts."\(^2\)

Yet al-\(\text{Ghāb}\) is more than a backdrop for their poems of longing and isolation, as these poets often find a moralistic and instructive element in nature. Such was the case with Abū ʻAlī, who found nature to be synonymous with beauty, which was, in his opinion, the only valid point of reference for a poet. In his verse Nature is often inexorably linked with celebrations of human love in its most ennobling form, which he believed to be far more influential than any man-made institutionalised morality. But, although his natural poems are often extremely idealised when concerned with his desire for his fatherland, he was aware that any retreat into nature had its shortcomings, and much of his poetry is marred by stubborn inquisitiveness and questioning about "meaningless and unnecessary suffering ('The Dumb Tear'); the vanity of worldly glory ('Clay'), metaphysical doubts ('Riddles'), [and] man's eternal restlessness ('In the Wilderness')."\(^3\)

On the contrary nature was an object of spiritual love and experience

\(^2\) Ḍayf, Dirāsāt, p. 176.
\(^3\) Badawi, M.A.P., p. 191.
for Naimy, who often seems to enter into a mystical partnership with it, in verse whose serene mood clearly illustrates why Mandûr called his poetry "ash-shi‘r al-mahmûs" (whispered verses)¹:

The people are going to the Mass, but we retreat to the Forest.
The trees of the Forest welcome us, and the birds of the Forest confide in us,
While the flowers of the Forest greet us, and we greet them and they gladden us.

So I sit upon the slope beside the river, between the boxthorn and the rose;
[And] the world is my kingdom and I the ruler of the world and of Fate.²

Jîbrîn also felt one with nature so that his soul "extended when he discussed nature, so that he felt himself to be a part of it and similarly estranged from mankind"³, but he sometimes felt that they combined to form one unit:

You are myself, O Earth! You are my sight and my insight:
You are my understanding, my imagination and my dreams; you are my hunger and my thirst; you are my pain and my

². For Arabic text see Ḍayf, Dirāsât, p. 177-8.
³. Bullâṭa, ar-Rûmāntiqīyya, p. 103.
happiness; you are my negligence and my vigilance.  
You are beauty to my eyes, longing in my heart, and eternity in my soul.  
You are myself, O Earth! For if I did not exist you would not exist.¹

In both these quotations there is an obvious mystical and spiritual tendency and, indeed, Jibrān's one attempt at sustained poetic composition al-Mawākib ("Processions") is "ultimately a romantic, primitivist philosophy, with an admixture of Blake's mystical respect for life and Nietzsche's glorification of it", whose message is "the need [of mankind] to return to nature"², and to flee the corrupt and unjust society of humanity. It was in this way that the poets and critics of the Mahjir added a spiritual dimension to their verse by giving expression to their inner world and philosophical ideologies therein. In al-Mawākib Jibrān explored the moral nature of "good and evil, the relation between the soul and the body, the problem of happiness, of social and political institutions, [and] of what man has made of man"³, in a way which invites the reader to become more involved with Jibrān the man than with his philosophy and style. But he was not unique in the Mahjir in this aspect because all of the major poets of this group dealt with metaphysical issues in a way which differed greatly from "that of the Arabs, with the exception of Abū l-'Alā' in his Luzūmiyyāt"⁴, although there is a similarity to

¹ For Arabic text see Bullāṭa, ar-Rūmāntīqiyya, p. 104.  
3. Ibid., p. 183.  
4. See Dayf, Dirāsāt, p. 159 for further details and quote.
the works of Omar Khayyam and Ibn Sinâ's *Ode on the Soul*, all of which were respected by the Mahjar. In this philosophising inclination, the Mahjar were fulfilling the wish of the Dîwân group in Egypt, who wanted the poet to concern himself with a profound and developed philosophy of life, rather than with flattering a patron or literary group.

However, their rebellion was not confined to the sphere of themes, but also extended into the realms of form, metaphor and diction, and the rejection of all literary modes and values which were not immediately applicable to their needs. Many, like Jayyusi, have claimed that each of these poets, and notably Mikhail Naimy, was so imbued with the literature of other languages that this, and his "comparatively scant knowledge of the classical heritage led him to believe in its worthlessness"¹, while Tāhâ Ḥusayn felt that they had not "perfected the means of poetry: they are either ignorant of the language or they have ignored it and proceeded to adopt their ignorance as a method or system."² As we have seen this was not true of Abû Mâqî or Rashîd Ayyûb, although Naimy admitted this weakness, and Jibrân probably suffered from it as well. But there is no doubt that their ties with the classical heritage of Arabic poetry were much looser than those of their fellow emigrés in Egypt or South America, or the Muslim poets of the east, so that it was easier, and perhaps necessary, for them to be more adventurous.

Their belief that poetry should be the sincere expression of life meant that their attitude towards language itself was more flexible than was the case with the other poets of this era. According to them

². See Badawi, *M.A.P.*, p. 185.
the aim of poetry is the expression of [our] experiences in life, just as we give expression to our thoughts and our emotions. For, indeed, language is but one of the many means to which mankind has recourse in the expression of [their] thoughts and emotions, while thoughts and emotions have an independent existence which language does not possess.

From this it is quite clear that the poet is made the centre of literature as is the case in all romantic theories, and Naimy goes on to claim that "language is one of the tools which man has created so as to communicate the impact of the requirements of his daily life upon his soul — both the sensual and the non-sensual — . . . [and it is hardly fitting] that the creation should become the master of the creator." Thus the poet, according to Naimy, ‘Ariḍa and Jibrān, even has the right to develop and mould the language according to his needs, and may even create new words or exceed accepted grammatical forms, if he finds this artistically necessary. Such beliefs were inimical to the theories of al-‘Aqqād, who wrote in his introduction to al-Ghirbāl,

The author [i.e. Naimy] believes that concern for the language is superfluous, and thinks that a writer or poet does not commit a fault as long as his intention is understood and the language conveys

his meaning [successfully] . . . In my opinion
a writer is freed from fault on certain occasions,
but only when the fault is better, more beautiful
and fulfilling than the correct version. 1

But the poets of the Mahjar continued to put their theories into
practice, using classical language where possible, vernacular sources,
and the simple diction of the Arabic Bible and other Christian works 2,
as well as borrowing phrases from European literature.

In his works Jibrān "rejected the diction of Arabic poetry and
substituted, in its place, a new diction drawn from the [Christian]
holy books and the testaments of the Messiah and the language of
Nietzsche" 3, while he also employed the colloquial, being greatly
influenced by the wording of Lebanese folk songs. In fact all the
poets of the Mahjar used simplified diction which was more immediately
accessible than that of their eastern contemporaries, so that even
someone as versed in the Arabic language as Rashīd Ayyūb was prevailed
upon to use language which was practically devoid of declamation or
classical rhetoric.

Changes in the diction of any literature necessarily involve
changes in metaphor and simile, and this was true of the poetry of the
Mahjar, who extracted many figures of speech from Arabic Christian
sources, as well as some traditional metaphors which were in harmony
with the thoughts and emotions involved in a particular poem. One

1. al-‘Aqqād, Introduction to al-Chirbāl, p. 11.
2. For detailed examples of their use of Biblical diction and the
language of other Christian works as sources see Moreh, M. A.
Poetry, p. 88-96.
3. ‘Alwān, Tatāwwur, p. 386.
of the most influential parts of the Bible in this field seems to have been the Sermon on the Mount, and there are verses by Abū Mādi, Nasīb ‘Arīda and Nudra Ḥaddād which were concerned with "praising the generosity of nature and urging man to be generous and as tolerant as nature is, [and] were the echo of the preachings of Jesus as related in the Sermon on the Mount." Furthermore this influence is also clear in the diction and symbolism of their verse, as, for example, the symbol of the lamb (hamal) which recurs several times, as does that of a man carrying the sufferings of mankind, or a cross. As has been said there is also evidence of borrowings from the Protestant hymns in Arabic and from other poetic parts of the Arabic Bible.

These sources also left a clear imprint upon their use of new verse forms. Although the majority of them felt that some prosodic rules were necessary for poetic composition they tended to make them subordinate to ideas, by claiming that the real significance of these rules was in deciding "the literary level of the poem, but not as evidence of it being poetry or not." Naimy, whose al-Chirbāl is in many ways the critical quintessence of the poetic theories of the Northern Mahjar, found metre a knotty problem, and appears to have changed his mind on several occasions. Poetic utterance was, in his opinion, the poet's manipulation of "his thoughts and emotions into measured, rhythmic phrases," but he had difficulty in deciding the

2. For details see Ibid., p. 89-91.
exact nature of the phrases. At one point he decided that both metre and rhyme were superfluous because they were only the implements of the poet, and "just as God is not invoked by the temple or its decoration but by the prayer springing from the depths of the heart, so the soul is not invoked by metre or rhyme, but by the accurate translation of its emotions and thoughts [into words]." But this perhaps appeared too extreme to him because he said in another chapter that "metre was necessary, whereas rhyme was not, especially when a single rhyme [had to be employed] throughout the whole poem, as in Arabic poetry." Perhaps Naimy recognised that metre of one sort or another was a necessary restraint upon any tendency towards verbosity, although it need not be confined to accepted regulated forms. In his own poetry he showed a distinct preference for simple metrical forms and for the rhythms of prose and those of Lebanese colloquial songs, so that "some of his poems comply with the tunes of the songs of his homeland which became firmly imbedded in him", while he also wrote in short metres and produced strophic verse after European models.

In fact this school of poetry shared a general liking for shorter stanzaic forms, short metres and strophic verse, including even those who had close knowledge of the laws of prosody, like Rashīd Ayyūb and Abū Māqī, although the latter continued to use the monorhymed form of the classical qasīda throughout his career. Perhaps ʿArīḍa had the most proficient control of his metre, moulding

2. Ibid., p. 86.
it into short metres with intense rhythms, which he changed at will according to the needs of his theme or expression. In his poetry the verse is the basic thematic unit within the unity of the complete poem, rather than the line, and, when these frequent rhythmical changes are combined with his nostalgia and "irresistable yearning for the undefined or the frustrated passion of the Sūfī muwashshahāh and erotic zajal"¹, the effect is striking and almost physical. This is clear in what is probably his most famous poem, "an-Nihāya", which "encouraged other poets in the Arab world to develop new forms and won the approval of the revolutionary poets among them."² In this poem ‘Arida made the foot (taf’ ila) the basis of his versification, and not the hemistich of Arabic poetic tradition, so that a single word could become a line, or could join with one or more taf’ ila as was required.³ The effect is striking, and it is interesting to note in passing that the form of ash-shihr al-Hurr (Free Verse) which swept across the world of Arabic poetry from the late 1940s, as developed by as-Sayyāb and al-Malā’ika, was also based on the taf’ ila.

These poets also took the development of the zajal and the muwashshah further to a "stage which is regarded as the prototype of more liberal forms in modern Arabic poetry"⁴, with the help of the nineteenth century translations of English Protestant hymns and the Bible, which had a dramatic effect on their versification, which was probably consolidated by their knowledge of western literature in

¹. Moreh, M. A. Poetry, p. 120.
³. See Moreh, M. A. Poetry, p. 115 ff. for further discussion.
⁴. Ibid., p. 102.
the original. There is evidence to support the theory that Christian Arabs had composed colloquial spiritual songs in zajal or al-mu‘anna as far back as the fifteenth or sixteenth century\(^1\), and that this had continued even after the Catholic and Maronite clergy adopted literary Arabic in their hymns in the late seventeenth century. When the American Protestant missionaries arrived in the early nineteenth century they preserved the rhythms of the vernacular poetry and songs in their translations and in their compositions, although they also adapted English prosody to suit their purpose.

From this we can see that the versification of the Northern Mahjar was a conglomerate of various cultural strands. They employed the classical form of the qaṣīda with its monorhyme and monometre, while also using forms reminiscent of European strophic verse, and of the zajal and muwashshah, as well as the form utilised by Protestant Arabic literature, in Lebanon and Syria. Furthermore they experimented with new forms like ash-shi‘r al-manthūr (prose poetry), although Naimy and ‘Arida concentrated on improving the form of strophic verse, perhaps because of their intimate liking for Russian poetry and its concern with melodic verse. Jibrān and Amīn ar-Rifānī believed firmly in ash-shi‘r al-manthūr and published many examples in the periodicals of the east, which were widely copied by the new generation of poets\(^2\), and did much to break down the barriers which were facing those Arabs who wished to broaden and enrich the versification of Arabic poetry.

1. For further detail see Moreh, M. A. Poetry, p. 104.
2. For the names of the early writers of ash-shi‘r al-manthūr, see Ibid., p. 298.
Perhaps the most striking feature of the poetry of the Northern Mahjar is its individualism and the powerful imagination exhibited therein. Imagination was as vital for these poets as it had been for Coleridge and other European romantics, because the "imagination of the poet was his essence."¹ Jibrān's imagination was closely linked to his philosophy and metaphysical questioning and, although somewhat melodramatic and idealistic, was capable of leaving a considerable trace in the mind of his audience, perhaps because of its psychological rather than its material accuracy. For Jibrān the imagination was instrumental in translating his mystical feelings and beliefs into literary facts, but it was a release from the painful present for 'Ārifā, who found the world of the imagination superior to and even more valid than his mundane existence within the society of mankind. Tāhā Ḥusayn described the Mahjar as "people endowed with a fertile nature, strong talents [and] wide-ranging imagination"², which is perhaps truest of Abū Māqī who, in spite of his prevalent pessimism, possessed an enviable imagination, which made him "the great poet he is, enabling him to express his attitudes, feelings and ideas in terms of images and concrete situations."³

Thus the poets of the Northern Mahjar proved themselves to be thoroughgoing romantics in theory and practice. Although some critics have claimed that their works remained European, such accusations can hardly be defended in the light of their physical and psychological situation in the U. S. A. In Poetry and the Making of Modern Egypt, Mounah Khouri announced that the poets of the Diwān

¹. Naimy, al-Chirba', p. 84.
². See Badawi, M.A.P., p. 185.
³. Ibid., p. 191.
group created the poetry of *wijdān* (sentimental poetry), and that there was only a tenuous link between the social and literary aspects of their poetry, so that their romanticism remained a "partial and superficial copy of its European model"\(^1\), when the popular prose writers of modern Egypt were deeply involved in social issues and the progression towards freedom from British control. But, although the social milieu of the *Mahjar* was different to that of the Egyptian romantics, both groups were expressing their individual situations in their poetry; the former telling of their alienation in a foreign society and their longing for the east, while the latter conveyed the psychological uncertainties brought about by the sudden changes and transformations which were taking place in society. In their so-called poetry of *wijdān* the *Mahjar* were, on the whole, answering their own requests for poetic sincerity, by communicating their own deep-seated emotional turmoil to their audience, according to their individual personalities, although it must be admitted that the poetry of *wijdān* produced by al-‘Aqqād and al-Māzīnī seldom gives the same feeling of personal communication. Indeed Jayyusi's description of Naimy as being able "to give through his poetry a successful example of his own literary criteria"\(^2\) could be applied to most of the poets of the *Mahjar*, who tried to put their own theories, or those of Jibrān and Naimy, into practice.

The true reasons for the success of the poets of the Northern *Mahjar* are, as Naimy pointed out, actually obscure\(^3\), but it is certain


\(^2\) Jayyusi, Trends and Movements, p. 120.

\(^3\) For discussion see Naimy, Kahlil Gibran, p. 157-8.
that they profited from the attempts of earlier Neo-Classicists and Pre-Romantics who had tried to make innovations in poetry so as to make it a more vital element in the lives of modern Arabs. Without the preparatory influence of earlier writers it is doubtful if Jibrân's rejection of tradition would have been tolerated in any literary circle, nor 'Arîda's experiments in versification, while Naimy's al-Chîrbâl might well have remained a collection of scattered articles rather than part of "the most important attack on orthodoxy at that time."¹

Yet it is ironic that this group, who attacked the bastions of frozen tradition so fiercely and successfully, were themselves slavishly copied and imitated. It "can safely be said that the whole generation of romantic poets who reached their maturity in the inter-war period came directly or indirectly under their pervasive influence"², but there was no generation in the U. S. A. to replace them, and the later romantic poets of Arabic literature lacked their philosophical and mystical interests, and this resulted in the emphasis being placed on the lyrical aspects of their poetry at the expense of its other facets. Consequently the verses of later Arab romantics are often imbued with their languid "disappointment in love or their dreams of political and social reforms in their country"³, while their treatment of Mahjârî imagery tended to be mimetic and, in many cases, was completely discordant with the mood or theme of the poem. However, there were also positive results from the Mahjârî interregnum, because the idols of classical traditions

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2. Ibid., p. 203.
were finally brought down to their proper stature so that they could be manipulated and sculpted according to the needs of Arab society, and the personality and talent of the individual poet, and developed into poetic forms capable of standing alongside the other great poetic literatures of the modern world, which could now be used as a mine of raw materials for further poetic developments in modern Arabic poetry, because of the Mahjari success in welding the two disparate cultures of the east and the west into one cohesive literary artifact.

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Abū Shādīf

In the East, however, romanticism in Arabic poetry can really be dated from the time of Ahmad Zakī Abū Shādīf (1892-1955) in whom many of the dominant strands of influence in modern Arabic literature were united. The early twentieth century was a time of uncertainty for both the younger and older generations of Egypt and this was, as we have seen, reflected in the poetry of this era, and in the choice of translations from European literature, which tended to be mostly romantic. With the political climate of the 1930s and the subsequent curtailment of free speech and democracy\(^1\), the young Egyptian poets turned inwards to their own emotions and experiences, using them as the poetic raw materials for their compositions, with only a few excursions into the realms of political or social verse. It was in this environment that the embryonic romantic theories of the previous era came to maturity, and Abū Shādīf was perfectly placed to lead the way.

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Abū Shādī was trained as a doctor and had a fine command of the English language and a good knowledge of its literature, and was even capable of composing verse in this language, and of making various translations from English literature, such as *The Tempest*. Of the English poets he preferred the romantics, and especially Wordsworth, Shelley and Keats, while A. C. Bradley's famous "Poetry for Poetry's Sake" had, undoubtedly, a profound effect upon him, so that he felt motivated to expound its salient points to other young Egyptian litterateurs¹, while making similar claims for literature on his own behalf. He was also a pupil of Khalil Muṭrān who tended towards French literature and critical theories, and announced, "It was that [i.e. "Poetry for Poetry's Sake"] together with the teachings of Muṭrān, which opened my eyes to the living world of English poetry."² Indeed Abū Shādī's poetic theories bear the obvious marks of the latter's influence, with his insistence on organic unity, innovations in poetic imagination and thought, the glorification of love, as well as in his lyric verse which is often strongly reminiscent of that of his self-confessed master.³ There is also no doubt that another formative influence on Abū Shādī was the poetry and prose of Khalil Jibrān and various other members of the Mahjar, as can be seen from his discussions concerning the poet and his poetry, which are based on romantic principles similar to those of the Mahjar.⁴ Like Jibrān Abū Shādī wanted to promote the cause of a literature which would adhere more closely to the normal life of the Arabs and so,

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1. See Badawi, M.A.P., p. 120.
2. See *Ibid.*, p. 120.
3. For further discussion of Muṭrān's influence on Abū Shādī, see *ar-Ramāḍī, Khalil Muṭrān*, p. 345 ff.
4. For further discussion see Moreh, M. A. *Poetry*, p. 161–2.
in 1932, he founded a new society in Egypt to further the aims of what was, basically, romantic literature on the lines of Arrabitah, calling it Apollo. The aims of this literary society were to support a new literary trend which would be capable of expressing the spirit of its era, while also assisting any literary movement which promised an improvement in Arabic literary standards generally, and giving material encouragement to poets when necessary, along with spiritual encouragement. Although the scope of the society and its magazine Apollo exceeded the limits of romantic theory, and Ahmad Shawqi, who had suffered so many bitter attacks at the hands of al-'Aqqād, was elected President, in point of fact, the majority of the writings published by this society had romantic inclinations, while the works most often translated from European literatures were those of Wordsworth and Shelley. This society, although attacked by al-'Aqqād, was to prove far more fruitful than the Diwan, and published and promoted the works of the most talented poets and critics of the time, such as ash-Shābbī, 'Alī Maḥmūd Ṭāhā, Ibrāhīm Nājī, Ilyā Abū Maqī and Shafiq al-Ma'āfūf, as well as those of Muṣṭafā Qādī ar-Rafi'ī, Ma'rūf ar-Rūṣāfī, Muḥammad Mahdī al-Jawahirī, and, surprisingly, even some of al-'Aqqād's work.

The Apollo magazine was forced to close in 1934 due to political and literary opposition, and Abū Shāfī's own work suffered similar problems, which perhaps accounts for the number of prefaces and critical appraisals published in Adabi, the collections of his own poetry and critical essays, or with his poetic diwāns, which are, predictably, complementary and generally defensive.

1. See Badawi, M.A.P., p. 128; and Bullāṭa, ar-Rūmāntqiyya, p. 126 ff.
2. Perhaps the best example of a critical preface is that of Abū Shāfī himself in his diwan, Fawa al-'Ubāb (Cairo, 1935).
In these essays and prefaces we find most of Abū Shādi's poetical theories, and especially those concerned with the poet himself and the nature of his compositions. For Abū Shādi poetry was not a craft but an art: "Poetry is not a craft, it is one of the arts, and all the arts are basically inborn talents, and the spirit which [lies] behind them is a shaft of light in Nature, from which all the poets, musicians, sculptors and such like draw their inspiration."¹ From this it is clear that poetry is part of existence generally, and cannot exist without some connection with the external world, having no autonomous status in itself. Yet it does not have to agree with all the rules of external accuracy, because, "'poetic truth' is different to 'scientific truth' . . . [because] 'scientific truth' demands precise information which is logical and realistic, while 'poetic truth' demands only the accuracy of the imagination and that of the senses."² Thus it is obvious that the poetry which Abū Shādi was advocating was founded neither on descriptive accuracy nor on the imitation of any existing model, but on poetic sincerity, the sincere expression of emotions and experiences, free from affectation and pretence. In his opinion poetry was essentially "the language of the feelings and their expression, but not the language of superficial feelings, for it expresses what lies behind the external reality . . . [it is in] the language of mankind in his infancy, in the language of the sentiments, before the intellect gained supremacy over them."³ In this way poetry might well have been given a rather limited scope by our poet, but, on the contrary, he felt that poetry

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² Abū Shādi, ash-Shu'la (Cairo, 1933), p. 9.
³ Ash-Shu'la, p. 7.
could not escape the influence of external factors, such as the poet's society and his cultural background, for, although poetry is "a living symbol of existence and what is behind existence", it should be "before all else the mouthpiece of modern life, and of the modern life which has connections with the poet, while aiming towards the future." Furthermore, the poet should not compose poetry for his own enjoyment, but should write it for the very love of verse, and for the "joy of spiritual communion" with his reader.

But how is poetry created, and what of its creator? In his introduction to ash-Shu’la he explained, "All I know is that the emotions storm in my mind, until some inspiration or entity overcomes me", whose echoes must be written down sooner or later. It is this that encourages the poet to place part of his own being into his verse. Abū Shādī declared, "My one incentive is my feeling that these words carry part of my spirit, compose the pages of my Self, and enclose the symbol of the ideals which I covet passionately, or the nearest reflection of them." Such theories are obviously influenced by those of the preceding modern Arab poets as well as by the romantic ideologies of Europe, as is true of his attitude towards the character of the poet.

1. In ash-Shu’la, p. 5, Abū Shādī states, "the soul of the poet is the result of national influences ... and is one of the fruits of the development of living nationalistic poetry."
2. Fawq al-‘Ubab, p. "hā".
4. See ash-Shu’la, p. 4.
5. Ibid., p. 5.
6. Ibid., p. 5.
As in the case of most romantic theories, Abū Shāḍī's poet is a devotee of beauty in all its manifestations, searching existence for inspiration and, having found it, assimilating and communicating his findings in the form of ash-shi’r as-sāfī, "pure poetry", which renders Nature more beautiful than its superficial appearance by illuminating the divine essence which lies behind it.² Although the poet is more than this because he is more than mortal, and a "messenger proclaiming a new religion"³, he is also part of his society and part of mankind, so that his poetry should pertain to everyone, irrespective of nationality or creed: "For [one of the things] which enoble poetry is its ability to describe its region accurately, so that most of it will not seem strange; but what augments its nobility is that it should imitate the universal truths of mankind."⁴ In this way the Arab poet becomes the custodian of the majestic past of his people, calling them to recreate their lost glory, both materially and spiritually, "for it is not enough for the poet to be descriptive, or to be content with being a story-teller... he should also be a follower of ideals, and this brings him, immediately, into the realms of philosophy."⁵ So, the poet is not a dreamer with his head in the clouds, he is one who has the ability to absorb the sensual impulses of this Universe, to perceive their essential nature and to re-emit them in verse, which is completely harmonious as regards thought,

1. ash-Shu‘la, p. 7.
2. For discussion of this point, see Badawi, M.A.P., p. 122.
4. ash-Shu‘la, p. 9.
5. Ibid., p. 8.
subject, expression, rhythm and rhyme, while also recreating his own personal experiences in verse. The vital element in this process is sincerity, because any pretence or lack of sincerity would render his composition incomplete: "any poet who does not possess freedom in expressing his spiritual crises, his poetic emotions and the world of his sentiments in an eternal and independent manner, in which his natural skill reveals itself, [must be] counted far from artistic perfection."¹

It is beauty which provides the poet with his inspiration, and, in Abū Shāḍī's opinion, woman was the most divine source of beauty available to mankind, because "in worshipping her we only-worship the God of life in his visible form"², for she is the spring of man's affection, love and even his life, and is, therefore, a divine symbol of God:

And the people and the world, and the splendour of eternity which they contrive for those who never saw it,
The next world, with its awards after the deprivation of past desires;
All of them are worth no more than an atom of your unique beauty which is like a [precious] jewel.

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1. al-Yanbū, "hā". For a poetic quote concerning the poet and his verse see "al-JaāḌīd", in Badawi, Anthology, p. 71-2.

One critic has seen this idealisation of womankind as psychologically linked with his love of his home, stating that "sometimes it is woman who makes the home dear to him, and sometimes it is the home which makes woman dear to him." However, it seems more likely that it was his spiritual and physical love for woman, that caused him to place her high on a pedestal. Yet this did not prevent the women in Abū Shādī's verse from being very much flesh and blood, especially when portrayed against a natural background:

0 daughter of Aphrodite, your beauty is displayed in your enchanting, undulating body,
Which the waves of the breeze have bewitched, and all the dew and light which the breeze carries with it.
You walk naked, like the torch of a lord whose inspiration is sought, like the inspiration of the mount.

Such verse did, of course, cause quite a stir in the society of his time, and even more so the photographs and paintings of nude or semi-dressed women which adorn some of his volumes. But Abū Shādī was by no means a mere disciple of the pleasures of the flesh and, as has already been stated, could appreciate the personality and

spirituality of women as well. In a poem, justly acclaimed by M. M. Badawi, "al-Jamāl al-‘Irshida", Abū Shāfi' combines the spiritual and physical aspects of the union between man and woman perfectly:

I stared, and I stared at her lovely and bashful body,
And saw the meaning of life, for [true] life is not in every being.
Then I knelt close [to her] to draw inspiration from her languid eyes,
And found them filled with dreams of vagrant passion.
I gazed at her, and I gazed, snatching their secrets,
And a tremor ran through my body, for it was as if my body had collected them.
Two souls created together, as light is created with heat,
Intermingling with each other, so that each of them was satisfied
And in every way their embrace won for them eternity,
So that when they parted, [their] existence was not this existence.

This union of bodies was like union with God.¹

The mystical tone of the poem, while raising sensual enjoyment above the domain of crudity, also takes man into the realms of the divine, and makes woman a superior rather than an equal partner in any act of love, because she has not only inspired the poet to passion,

1. Edham, p. 12-13 (Arabic text).
but also to artistic composition by her character and beauty. It is this attitude towards woman that made Abū Shādī "the greatest promoter of womankind among the Arab poets."\(^1\)

Such love of feminine beauty is obviously connected with his interest in love, which is one of the dominant themes of his verse, and which is often treated lyrically, conveying an emotion which haunts the reader, and is sometimes very tender:

Wake me with your song as if [I was] drunk,\(^2\) sometimes drunkenness is like a dream of serenity and sleep.

This pleasure is not to be measured by another, except by that which you permit, and my reproof.

Between two dreams of you, my ears hear the prolonged melody of Paradise, my dream.\(^2\)

The problem of such love is that it is uncertain and full of anxiety, because the lover fears the loss of his beloved, and, paradoxically, takes refuge in unreality:

What is the matter with my eyes that whenever I see you they weep?

Is it with joy they weep or for fear that my dream be shattered?

My hope neither fades away nor does it grow bright

And like a man lost and weary I rush to seek refuge with illusions.\(^3\)

\(^1\) 'Abd al-Ghafūr, Abū Shādī, p. 65.
\(^2\) From "Bayn Ḥulmayn", Edham, p. 2.
\(^3\) For English translation of "Devotions", see M.A.P., p. 121.
While some critics believe such grief to be due to his exile from Egypt\(^1\), the fact that this poem appeared in \textit{Andā' al-Fajr}, his first serious volume, indicates that it sprang rather from the deep-seated strangeness so common among romantic poets, which was probably accentuated by his readings of romantic literature in English and Arabic. The same was probably true of the bitterness exhibited in his verse when his love was not satisfied:

\begin{quote}
You left me conquered, bereft and wounded in wakefulness and alertness,
And begrudged me even an embrace, so that I became the sacrifice in the delight of the heedful.
And you thought that you were mine! How hard is affection on me! And how sweet to the ear!
Your coquetry thought that I would be choked with a kiss,
but I am bold, although I was not bold [before].

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You ask me when we shall part? Will you bid welcome then, on the day of my farewell?!\(^2\)
\end{quote}

The style of his love poetry is often classical, and sometimes contains echoes from the verse of the classical Arab poets, and of the spiritual \textit{ghazal} verse of the Sufis, but the expression and the diction are modern, because the poetry is the sincere artistic expression of the poet's emotions, while it is also timeless, because it is inexorably linked with an important feature of man's existence.

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1. For discussion of this point see ar-Ramāḍī, Khalīl Muṭrān, p. 345.
2. From "\textit{Tāṣa"alīn}", Edham, p. 4.
As another source of beauty, Nature often provided Abū Shādī with a scene for his love poetry, in a way which is often strikingly lyrical, and its imagery disturbingly emotive:

The drops [of rain] fall from the hand of one flower to another, and to yet another, and all become drunk; But I am alone, so where, where is the beloved to assuage [my] ardent passion and extinguish the fire?¹

Nature is very important in the poetry of Abū Shādī, and provided the retreat from the harassment of everyday life which the poet felt so necessary, so that it became "his refuge, protecting him from the corruption of mankind, and sparing him from the pain he experienced while amongst them."² Thus, Nature is seldom inanimate in his verse, but takes on a life which is fundamentally its own, and a significance beyond itself:

And the breeze dallies with the white poplar, embracing [it], as if the breeze trembled beside it, So that the leaves on the branches quiver continually, in a single tremor, and are suddenly bewitched.³

Yet Nature, like man, cannot exist without interacting with the rest of Creation, and, as part of the same universe, both are therefore capable of mutual contentment and spiritual communion. In the same

3. al-Yanbūf, p. 5.
short poem, Ra'shat al-Hur, the poet writes, "This Nature is always in mutual harmony, so why are we defeated before it?" It is this "mutual" harmony that the poet delights in, and senses as his source of inspiration rather after the manner of Wordsworth, as can be seen from the following quote:

And poetry is in my opinion feelings, and the emotions of Nature,
For in this mingling [lies] joy, and the kingdom of the meek soul.

In fact, this sense of communion with Nature goes beyond the realms of the two separate existences of Nature and man, so that the poet is himself absorbed into Nature:

It is as if the sand dunes were a treasury for the rays of the sun, so that they glory in every precious thing.
Night draws near, and makes off with the different shadows and colours before they escape, without shame,
For these are types of life which are dispersed, and these are the notions of desires and Fate.

The suggestive imagery and the ethereal language of these examples are one of the hallmarks of Abū Shādī's nature poetry, and it was his powers of description that made him "one of the most

1. al-Yanbū', p. 5.
2. See Edham, p. 30 (English text).
3. ash-Shu'la, p. 21-2.
important nature poets in modern Arabic." As we have seen he
achieved this effect mainly by personification, giving what was really
a human existence to Nature:

And see the pools weeping at their farewell to the light,
      between the veils of the darkness,
Pained by the suspension of life till the morrow, so that
      their prayer is like compassion for mankind.

while, at other times, he mixes it with simple, but stunning description:

Pale like death with a blood-like streak of red,
As if slain by the ruthless orders of autumn.

Some of his best descriptive verse involves the sea and rivers, which,
he felt, were closely linked to man in his innocence, and were still,
therefore, a source of purity and inspiration:

Rock in the surge and waves, a heart thirsty for your
      protection,
And pour forth your beloved rest, for you are a convalescence
      for the likes of my afflicted heart;
Wash the pebbles, for these are hearts which have been
      scattered in the sand and buried,

1. M.A.P., p. 122. For further discussion of nature verse see Ibid.,
p. 123 and p. 126.
2. See Edham, p. 38 (Arabic text).
3. For this translation see M.A.P., p. 123.
Renew their life and their purity, and then satisfy them with affection and melody.¹

Descriptions of seascapes were also closely associated with his use of light imagery, as in "al-Amwāj":

A feast at which light is intoxicated, and caprice sings therein as it wishes.²

But light is more pervasive in his poetry and is sometimes couched in mystical or philosophical notions, as in "al-Bidāya wa-n-Nihāya", where he says:

From light we began and to light we shall pass, as we began in beams.

All of Existence is [made up of] waves of light which end in an instant, and begin.³

In fact, like his Tunisian protégé ash-Shābbī, light and shade imagery is found throughout his poetry, but Abū Shādī made such extensive use of it that Muṭrān dubbed him "the poet of light."⁴ While

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1. Badawi, Anthology, p. 74. For further examples see ‘Abd al-Ghufūr, M., ar-Rif fi Shi‘r Abī Shādī (Cairo, 1935), p. 12, "ṣan-Nīl"; p. 65, "al-Mir‘āt al-'Aমīn".
2. Badawi, Anthology, p. 74.
3. Fawq al-'Ubab, p. 68. See ash-Shu‘la for another fine example of this in the poem of the same name.
there is little doubt that Abū Shādī’s claim to poetic fame rests in his pastoral verse, his love poetry and other lyrics, it is in his expert manipulation of natural imagery and images of light and love that his true greatness lies.

His narrative verse is, unfortunately, less satisfying. These poems normally dealt with historical subjects and were obviously encouraged by similar poems written by Muṭrān. An example of this is "Akhenaton", a dramatic work in verse probably composed under the influence of Muṭrān, in which Abū Shādī’s interest in stories and myths is extremely clear. Although this interest is also discernible in his lyrics, it is nowhere more obvious than in his narrative verse, and this led him to make use of "mythological stories, and compose unusual modern stories from both original and traditional [sources]", including Greek myths, for which he was fiercely attacked by the traditional elements in society. However this did not deter Abū Shādī, and he continued to draw on such sources, while the younger generation soon took to imitating him, and even improving upon the poetic use of such ancient mythologies.

Some of his narrative poetry was basically social, such as the poems "Abduh Bey" or "Maha", as Abū Shādī was passionately involved in the political and social welfare of his fellow Egyptians throughout his life, in spite of his emigration to America, where, if anything, his socially inclined verse became more forceful:

1. For a list of some of these narrative poems see M.A.P., p. 119.
3. ‘Abd al-Ghafūr, Abū Shādī, p. 75-76; see p. 76 for example. See also Chapter V.
Home of my youth, the dearest dream of my young days,
You are still my dream and my sweet comfort.¹

According to 'Abd al-Ghafûr, Abû Shâdî wrote two types of national poetry, which were inter-connected: the first being "the policy of preparation, reminding and encouragement directed towards the faithful members of his nation", while the second was the "policy of censure and disparagement, set in the tone of faithful and confident advice."² However, whatever the motive or the mood of such verse, Abû Shâdî was interested in the good of his compatriots, and was aware that his destiny and life would always be tied in with theirs:

I am a son of Egypt, I weep for its anguish, I am loyal to her in my melodies.
I am oblivious to what weighs heavily upon me, so as to express her [state] in all my sorrows,
For indeed her happiness is but my happiness, and her sorrows my cares and my sorrows.³

One of the causes of dissension, according to Abû Shâdî, was religious differences, so he called for complete equality, intermarriage and harmony between the Christians and Muslims in Egypt, and for the abolition of the Azhar's reactionary influence.⁴ He felt that religious equality in Egypt was a pre-requisite for cultural

1. For this translation see M.A.P., p. 127.
2. 'Abd al-Ghafûr, Abû Shâdî, p. 30. See following pages for examples.
3. See Edham, p. 16, "Manazil an-Nill" (Arabic text).
4. Ibid., p. 27 (English text).
development, and also believed in it from a moral viewpoint, expounding theories about the unity of mankind, while his political aspirations were towards a World State.¹

Such ideologies take us into the field of philosophy, in which Abū Shādī was greatly interested. In a poem aptly called "Amal al-Insāniyya" he declared:

In my opinion, Creation is victorious, groaning under the burden of progress, whenever it raises further!

..............................................................

And I am a messenger with hope for tomorrow, telling of the future which will ennoble the intellect,
For even if Fate crushes mankind, I feel that Fate shall never crush the root,
And that the death of man shall be renewed life ... ²

This is a clear statement of his belief in the eventual perfectability of mankind, even if such an ideal appears Utopian at this stage of human evolution. While some may feel that poetry is not the place for philosophy, and especially that of a romantic poet, Abū Shādī felt that philosophy and humanitarianism were two of the constituents of art, because everything in this universe, can be harnessed for the needs of artistic expression.³ In actual point of fact Abū Shādī's philosophical claims are often closer to mysticism than metaphysics,

1. See Edham, p. 21-2.
2. See Ibid., p. 23 (English text).
because he sought to fathom the secrets of the Unknown through the senses rather than the intellect. Early in his poetic career Abū Shādi wrote these lines:

I stand all alone, a poet in self-communion,
Thirsty for the Truth, wondering about the world.¹

The world ignored him, and he found no answers, but later in life he had become aware of the oneness of Existence, and wrote:

I feel that I am continually merging with Creation, so that the great Creation becomes my life.
I contemplate the hours in its mass, and it is as if I contemplated my [own] reflection
Obtaining sympathy from the beauty of its affection,
travelling inextricably towards my soul.²

There are thus many sides to Abū Shādi's poetry, ranging from the simple lyric to metaphysical and mystical concern for existence, and zealous interest in the affairs of his homeland and his nation. Yet, as we have seen, his language is usually simple, although the thoughts expressed thereby may be difficult and even abstruse. While Abū Shādi did sometimes err on the side of verbosity, his language was generally attractive and suggestive of "unknown modes of being"³

¹ For this translation see M.A.P., p. 120
² Edham, p. 31 (English text).
³ M.A.P., p. 119.
and there is no doubt that he was extremely proficient in manipulating the Arabic language to suit his expression and his theme.\(^1\) He recognised the shortcomings of traditional metaphors and symbolism and deliberately adopted what he termed an "uslūb muta‘ādil", a "neutral style"\(^2\), free from inherited peculiarities; although it should be pointed out that traces of the classical qasīda remain in his verse, which is by no means free from difficult diction requiring explanation.

However, he generally moulded his language to suit the thematic purport of his poetry, as he chose his metre according to his subject and his mood. While Moreh may well be correct in his claim that Abū Shādī's forays into the use of free verse were the first serious attempts in modern Arabic literature\(^3\), it is clear from a perusal of his dawāwin, that Abū Shādī tended to make predominant use of the classical qasīda format, which perhaps vindicates the claim made in the same book that "his aim is to get rid of unnecessary chains, not of artistic rules".\(^4\) Yet Abū Shādī did use free verse on some occasions, when it was necessary for his freedom of expression, and called on others to do likewise.

The free verse adopted by Abū Shādī was closer to that of English literature than to vers libre, which is hardly surprising when we remember his marked preference for English literature. It was, like the later experiments of al-Malā‘īka and as-Sayyāb, based on the foot (taf‘īla), and was not divided into the traditional two

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1. For discussion of this see ‘Abd al-Ghafūr, Abū Shādī, p. 75 and 78.
2. See Edham, p. 37 (English text), note 12.
4. Ibid., p. 164.
hemistichs, but it continued to be based on the Arabic metres, and was, thus, never ash-shi’r al-manthūr, "prose poetry ", although he encouraged others to employ the latter. Basically, Abū Shādī used different metres to suit the unique expression of a particular poem, believing that the metrical form should be in harmony with the expression, and vice versa, and coherent with the natural style of each poet. To this end he pointed out that the traditional schools of poetry accepted the zajal, mawāl and the muwashshah, which had been innovations originally, and demanded that the same tolerance be extended to ash-shi’r al-hurr, and even to ash-shi’r al-manthūr. 1

It was perhaps Abū Shādī’s preference for lyrical and musical verse that prevented him from employing the prose poetry which he advised others to use in his own works, and curtailed his metrical experiments. In fact, much of his influence in the development of modern Arabic poetry stems not from his own compositions, but from his critical works and their effect on the subsequent generation, and on his contemporaries, as it appears that even Shawqi was influenced by Abū Shādī’s advocacy of free verse. 2 The problem with Abū Shādī’s verse is its massive bulk, and the fact that it was often full of "cold compositions, repetitive concepts, and parched language" 3, although it also exhibits genius and inspiration. His prolific output probably arose out of his wide range of interests, but it was also due to his impatience when it came to publishing his works, so that, unlike Muṭrān who continually refined and refurbished

2. See Ibid., p. 173.
his poems, Abū Shādi’s poetry often appeared without improvements or revisions and exclusions, with the result that some of his poems are marred by padding, loose constructions and meandering meditations.

However, his charming and magical lyrical verse, and his impressive descriptive powers should not be underrated, nor should his love poetry, or the accomplished elegies which although somewhat classical appear to have been sincere. But still his real contribution lies in the examples he set for the next generation of poets in the Arab world through his critical essays and prefaces, and through his Apollo school, which promoted the works of ‘Ali Maḥmūd Ṭāhā, Ilyās Abū Shabaka and Ibrāhīm Nājī, who were to exert such a profound influence on the poetry of the Arab lands up until the 1950s and even beyond, and who will be discussed in the next chapter, as they have a special place in influencing the development of poetry in Iraq, and especially that of the young as-Sayyāb.

ash-Shābbī

Before progressing to these poets we must first consider the Tunisian poet Abū l-Qāsim ash-Shābbī (1909-34), whose poetry and prose highlight the romantic nature of the literary climate in the Arab lands at this time. Although he had not studied any European language, ash-Shābbī was deeply influenced by the pseudo-romantic theories of the Diwān group, and by the more purely romantic ideals

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1. See Edham, p. 48-54 for examples (Arabic text).
2. For further discussion of Abū Shādi’s works see above bibliography and Nāzarāt Naḍīyya fī shi’r Abī Shādi (Cairo, 1925), by al-Jadāwī, H. Šāliḥ.
of Apollo, both of which enjoyed wide, if not always complementary, fame in literary circles. Furthermore, he greatly admired the romantic works of the Mahjar and especially those of Khalîl Jibrân¹, whose attitude towards the poet as a divine prophet was clearly a factor in ash-Shâbbî's adaptation of a similar stance, while there are obvious reflections of the pastoral verse of the poets of the Mahjar in that of ash-Shâbbî. Ultimately, ash-Shâbbî's knowledge of romanticism came through three major channels: the numerous translations from European literature which were appearing in Arabic newspapers and literary magazines in ever increasing numbers; the poetry and criticism of the Mahjar, who were in turn indebted to their acquaintance with European literatures; and the works of Abû Shâdî and the fellow-members of his Apollo Society, who had close knowledge of various European literatures, and who were the first to publish the poetry of ash-Shâbbî. From these channels ash-Shâbbî gleaned his knowledge of the literatures of the Western world, and it is interesting to note that "his poetry and his criticism reveal a much deeper influence by, and a much greater understanding of western literature than that which we find in the works of many poets who mastered one or more European languages"², despite the traditional literary climate of Tunisia at that time, and his traditional madrasa training which left him with a fine command of the Arabic language and open admiration for the works of al-Ma'arrî, Ibn ar-Rûmî and Ibn al-Farîd.

These influences, while also present in his poetry are particularly clear in his criticism. In al-Khayal ash-shi‘rî ‘inda al-‘Arab, and

¹. See at-Tillisî, K. M., ash-Shâbbî wa-Jibrân (Beirut, 1967) for further details.
other critical works, ash-Shābbī announced that the Arabs lacked the poetic imagination necessary to produce an intricate and imaginative mythology comparable to that of Greece, Rome or Scandinavia, because of a basic defect in their psychology: "The defect, in my opinion, is the soul of the Arab peoples [itself], because it is materialistic and primitive... for if you study its artistic traces [in the fields of] literature, sculpture, painting and mythology you will find nothing of expression of emotion, depth of imagination, or spiritual sense."¹ According to ash-Shābbī this is particularly true in the case of love poetry and verses involving women, where only her external and superficial features are deemed worthy of note: "The attitude of Arabic literature to woman is base and ignoble, and sinks to the lowest depths of materialism. It only sees in woman a body to be desired and one of the basest pleasures in life to be enjoyed."² He goes on to praise the "spiritual attitude" of the Aryan race towards women, presumably wishing the Arabs to follow a similar path in their treatment of the fair sex, in the same way as he begs them to study carefully those cultures which possess a richly imaginative literature, and to adopt and borrow from its spirit, so as to improve the nature of modern literature, just as Arabic literature would have gained from translating Greek or Roman literature, instead of concentrating on criticism and philosophy: "For they did not translate anything from Greek or Roman literature, and only a little from the literature of India and Persia, and this was one of the factors which caused the spirit of Arabic literature to adhere to its earliest form."³

1. For quote see Kirrū, Abū 1-Qāsin Muḥammad, Athār ash-Shābbī wa-Ṣadāh fī sh-Sharq (Beirut, 1961), p. 145.
For ash-Shābbī his era was vital and of paramount importance for Arabic literature generally, because "modern Arabic literature had [now] mixed with the [other] literatures of the world in a way which was unknown in the history of literature throughout the preceding eras"\(^1\), so that, although it was still necessary for modern poets to admire and praise the classics as part of their heritage and as a source of beautiful expression, they could express themselves more freely. In this vein he encouraged them to respect the old models, but warned them, "This respect must not change to sanctification, worship and inflexibility, and thus prevent us from seeing all the radiant lights and stars in the sky".\(^2\) In al-Khayāl ash-Shi‘rī ʿinda al-‘Arab, he was more concise: "We must never look upon Arabic literature as an ideal which we have to follow or whose spirit, style and ideas we have to imitate, but we must consider it simply as one of those ancient literatures which we admire and respect and no more."\(^3\)

Such theories obviously have much in common with those of many Arab critics at that time, and especially those who were influenced by the nineteenth century European theories, such as those of Renan, concerning the power of common racial characteristics over the production of any work of art.\(^4\) Likewise, his theories concerning the need for poets to study widely in life and literature have much in common with those of his contemporaries, and especially those of Mikhail Naimy and the rest of the Mahjar.

\(^1\) Kirtī, p. 110.
\(^2\) Ibid., p. 129.
\(^3\) See this translation, K. A. P., p. 159.
\(^4\) For more details see Semah, Four Egyptian Critics, p. 76-8 and index. Al-ʿAqqād and M. Ḥusayn Haykal are the two most obvious cases.
His attitude towards poetry and the poet is also close to that of Naimy, Jibrān and Abū Shādī. Poetry, according to ash-Shābbī was firmly rooted in the sincere expression of the suffering and pain of the poet himself:

0 poetry, you are the mouthpiece of feelings, and the entreaty of the sad spirit.
0 poetry, you are the echo of the heart's lamentations, and its strange outpourings.

0 poetry, you are the tears clinging to the eyelashes of life.
0 poetry, you are blood, pouring from the wounds of existence.¹

Its origins are, nonetheless, divine, and it is thus capable of consoling the poet and his reader by its haunting beauty and its eternal message:

0 poetry, 0 inspiration of the undaunted presence, 0 language of the angels,

Sing, for my days are weeping at the sounds of your flute.²

Indeed poetry is more than the overflow of the poet's emotions and his appreciation of beauty and truth, it is the receptacle of the poet's whole existence, which the poet then sends forth into the world, to tell others of his suffering and his message:

2. Ibid., p. 98.
In you I have enclosed my Self, and into you I have breathed my emotions,
So chant of my anguish on the hilltops of life, 0 my bird.¹

His definition of poetry is not, however, completely subjective; it is also concerned with portraying the customs of the community, its character, its beliefs, its suppositions, its virtues and its vices², either consciously or subconsciously, because the personal character of the poet and, to a lesser extent, the character of his society are inherent in any literature which claims to deal in emotions and experiences, and expressive poetry is only possible after these have actually "lived in his heart and blazed in his life"³, among his fellow men. But the objective elements in his theories are subordinate to the subjective because the true poet is naturally more capable of communicating what is in his own heart than the fears and hopes of society at large, for "art is essentially a representation of the life lived by the artist in this vast brimming existence, or in the world of his imagination and dreams."⁴ From this it is plain that poetry, while evolving and existing in this world, is also part of a greater and immaterial existence, where the imaginative world of the poet is as valid as the tangible one, and where beauty and truth have their own rules, even if they appear contrary to what is normally found in our material creation. Thus, poetry is not simply a small part of the poet's life or that of his community, nor is it

2. Ibid., p. 131.
3. Ibid., p. 120.
4. Ibid., p. 122.
a mere inanimate copy of life and its emotions; it is indeed far more pervasive, it is "a representation of the effects of this life, which are felt" deep in the poet's soul, in fact "poetry is life itself." Conversely the poet's art is the cause and sustainer of his existence, but who, and what, is this poet? In his essay "al-Adab al-'Arabi fi l-'Aqr al-Nādir" ash-Shābbī gives us a romantic description of the poet as a free-spirited, smiling individual who, "like a bird in the sky, or a wave in the sea" or "an ardent hymn on the horizon of the open spaces", should not be enslaved by the mundane demands of existence. Yet he remains mortal, and "when we read the verse of a poet we find therein a man of flesh and blood, who lives and breathes, feels and thinks" in the same manner as the rest of mankind. But, ash-Shābbī does give the impression that a poet, while being a man, can dictate to, or even exceed, the laws of Nature:

O death! 0 blind Fate! Stay where you are! Or go!
And leave us here: [where] dreams, love and great Existence sing to us.

The poet is also more sensitive than his fellow men, and possesses a powerful imagination, which enables him to achieve a more accurate grasp of reality, so that he can maintain "a balance between the

2. Ibid., p. 130.
3. Ibid., p. 114-125.
4. Ibid., p. 121.
5. Ibid., p. 121.
6. Ibid., p. 76.
emotion, thought, imagination, style and measures" of his poetry, which should only include "the highest forms of life", bestowing upon it "a musical life [of its own], chosen so as to express its soul in the art of words." Moreover, the poet also partakes of the nature of prophethood, "seeing what [other] people do not see, and feeling more sublimely than they feel":

For he is a prophet in the school of life, although [called] mad, among his people.³

For his prophethood and desire to assist mankind in this vale of woe are ignored and rejected:

Then I arranged a bouquet from the flowers of my heart, which no mortal had touched, And offered it to you. But you tore apart my blossoms, and trampled upon them, Then you made for me a garment of sorrow, and crowned my head with the thorns of the mountain.⁴

But ash-Shābbī gives us a more substantial description of the poet and even enumerates various sub-types of poet⁵, claiming that all should possess the qualities mentioned in the above quotations,

2. Ibid., p. 141.
3. Ibid., p. 64.
4. Ibid., p. 62.
5. See Ibid., p. 118–9 for details.
as well as being capable of drawing inspiration from all that is contained in "Arabic literature, its history and its myths, as regards the forms of art and the signs of beauty, and [of] then adding to all this what he perceives of the present life of the Arab community according to various feelings and kindled dreams, and the states wherein truth and beauty are intertwined."\(^1\)

There are thus two sides to the poet's nature. In the mechanical sphere of composition he should be well-versed in Arabic poetry and have some knowledge of world literatures other than this, while, in the psychological and spiritual sphere, he should be a man of fine sensibility, who has some, if not all, of the attributes of a prophet, and is pledged to leading mankind into a better existence by revealing to him both his own essential nature and that of Existence. The fact that this prophet is rebuffed and ignored in his poetry, is not logically connected with this poetic prophethood but, like the idea of the poet-prophet itself, is a result of the strong influence of Jibrān and Abū Shādī upon him, as both of them depicted the poet as a divine messenger whose message is rejected by a corrupt and unfeeling society. It was also a result of the general malaise of Arab society at that period, perched precariously as it was between the standards of traditional culture and the growing strength of the new social norms imported from the west, and divided between the various colonial powers of Europe, struggling to regain its autonomy while surrounded by foreign domination. Yet, in ash-Shābī's case, the roots of these feelings of alienation go much deeper into the realms of his private life, which was beset by illness, and into his personal psychological and emotional structure, so that in the poem "The Lost Desires", we

\(^1\) Kirrū, p. 116.
feel he is giving poetical vent to his personal emotions, and to the problems of this world:

O essence of life, how strange I am in this world, suffering from the strangeness of my Self,

Among a people, who neither understand the songs of my heart, nor the meaning of my distress;

In a world, shackled in fetters, lost in the darkness of doubt and misfortune.¹

This alienation is confirmed and explored in an entry in his diary, dated 7/1/1930:

I feel I am a stranger in this Existence, and that with every day [which passes] I shall feel more strange amongst the sons of life, and feel this painful strangeness more acutely. Alien is the one who roams the unknown regions of the earth and traverses the limits of the Unknown [al-Majhûl], then returns to tell his people about his distant journeying and finds that not one of them understands anything of the language of his soul.²

Such feelings are, of course, not unique to the Arab romantic poets, and bear a striking resemblance to the feelings of many great romantic authors and poets, as does his attitude towards society, which he sees as corrupt and self-seeking:

¹ Kirrû, p. 83.
² See Ibid., p. 150.
... . . . . . But you are a tribe who measures life by
the grave!
You are a stupid soul, who hates the light, and spends its
time in an endless night;
You would not understand the truth if it surrounded you,
without touching and examination!

In contrast Nature, or more literally al-ghāb, although by no
means a source of ecstasy for ash-Shābbī, provides our poet with a
refuge, and with a society which is closer, he feels, to reality and
more sincere than that of man; just as it had been for the poets of
the Mahjar:

I shall recite my songs to the birds, . . . . .
For they know the meaning of life and know that the
glory of souls is the awareness of the senses. 2

The reason for this sympathetic concourse between the poet and Nature
lies, basically, in the fact that they are both closer to the source
of Creation and, being without affectation, more vulnerable to the
dictates of Fate than the rest of mankind, with their self-styled
moral and social codes of practice. The poet, having cut himself
loose from the chains of society, is free to commune with Nature,
but ash-Shābbī seldom enters into a truly empathic relationship with
Nature, and Nature is usually manipulated by the poet to reflect his

2. Ibi d., p. 63. For discussion of ash-Shābbī's retreat to al-ghāb,
along with that of the Mahjar, see Bullāst, ar-Rūmāntiqiyya, p. 169.
emotions sympathetically, and to provide a suitable atmosphere for his verse. ¹

The situation of the poet in his natural retreat is often interspersed with recollections of, and meditations upon childhood, which is described as a prelapsarian state of existence, where the innocence of mankind is like that of Nature:

Days when life possessed the freshness of the rain-soaked meadow,
And the purity of the beautiful wave, the magic of the luminous shore,
And the meekness of the sparrow²

As is obvious, his attitude towards Nature is purely romantic, and the sway of romanticism is nowhere more pervasive than in ash-Shābī's pastoral verse, in which it also ventures into the realms of diction and imagery, both of which resemble that of the Arabic romantic genre, and that of nineteenth century Europe.³

As might be expected ash-Shābī's treatment of Nature is highly idealised, so that we seldom see its less salubrious side, as we see the horrors of human society⁴, and his treatment of women is similarly biased. In fact, the women in ash-Shābī's verse seldom

¹. For discussion of his treatment of Nature see Kirrū, p. 221-6.
². Ibid., p. 77.
³. For particular examples see "an-Nabī al-Mahjūl", Ibid., p. 62-4; and "al-Janna ad-Dā'ī'a", Ibid., p. 77-80; and "Qalb al-Umm", Ibid., p. 91-5.
⁴. For the precise description of human error and cruelty see Ibid., p. 79.
remind us of flesh and blood, and are usually seen as superior to the self-interest of this jostling world:

You are like a beautiful rose in the forest, but [you flourish] between thorns and worms,

Yet herbs believe that the evil thorns and worms are a species of flower;

So understand people! For people are a corrupt creation in Existence, [and] wrongly guided.¹

The reason for her need to understand people and to remain distant from them lies in her spiritual and semi-divine nature, which would be tainted by their company:

For you are a beautiful spirit under the Heavens, which God has fashioned from the scent of the rose.

You are one of the feathers of God, so do not associate the art of the sky with the ignorance of man.

You were not created for the people to draw near, but rather to be worshipped from afar.²

Such a position is, of course, similar to that of the poet as regards his society and there is an obvious connection between the idea of the misunderstood poet-prophet and the woman in this qasida, so that one cannot help but associate her with the poet and, therefore,

1. Kirri, p. 86.
2. Ibid., p. 86.
with his source of inspiration, the Muse, as in another famous poem, "Prayers at the Altar of Love":

What are you? Are you Venus, come again to the world
To bring back youth and sweet joy to this stubborn, wretched world?

You . . . what are you? You are a beautiful and ingenious design [wrought] from the art of this Existence.
Whenever my eyes fall upon you, you float with rhythmic steps, which are like songs.  

Thus, his love poetry, and poems dedicated to women generally, sometimes take on a much wider significance, often implying his desire to be at one with his fellow-mortals, rather than separated from them as is the case in so many of his poems. An example of this can be found in his poem "When I See You":

Filled with an infinite joy as if I had been raised above all men
Wishing to embrace the universe with my soul, and all its men and all its trees.  

Such feelings of mystical union are also ultimately concerned with his desire to rediscover and re-unite with his other Self, his

soul, which so often seems distant and unattainable, as in "The Orphan's Complaint", where the orphans' mother is like a symbol for the poet's own soul:

But when I lamented without avail, and had called on my mother, although she did not hear,
I [returned] on my own, [hugging] my sadness, and turned my weeping upon my own ears,
Clutching my anguish in my loneliness, and said to myself, 'Just be silent!'\(^1\)

In some poems the self-alienation is even more pronounced, so that the poet feels that his material Self is so far removed from his soul that it cannot even hear its anguish:

So bitter is my grief, yet when my soul screams
My very own body can hear nothing.\(^2\)

However, such pessimistic internal division, anguish and alienation does not fill all his poems, and ash-Shābbī was capable of ending his verse on a contented, and even optimistic note. For example, in "A Voice from the Sky", the poet asks the celestial orbs to reveal to him the true nature of this "abominable world", having asked several times without receiving a reply, which is eventually granted to him because of his persistence:

\(^1\) Badawi, *Anthology*, p. 102.
\(^2\) See this translation, *N.A.F.*, p. 162.
I heard a bewitching voice undulating above the fragrant and verdant meadows,
And the rustling of wings in the open spaces, and an echo resounding above the silence of the forest:
'The dawn shall be born with a smile, rejoicing in Creation, between the gloom and the mist.'

It is interesting that the political works of ash-Shābbī often end hopefully, while his more personal and lyrical verse is often imbued with sadness and despair, and that ash-Shābbī unlike Nājī, who derived only pain from his fatherland, produced some of his best poetry when sporting the cause of his nation. In point of fact, ash-Shābbī's patriotic verse had a greater impact than he probably envisaged, and has been sung in many Arab states since its publication, and Shawqi Ḍayf was probably correct when he stated that "no poet from these countries [i.e. Egypt, Syria, Lebanon and Iraq] achieved what ash-Shābbī achieved in Tunisia", while Abū Shādī's claim that ash-Shābbī's nationalistic verse, written within the space of six years, was "an unprecedented and powerful catalyst in the [sphere of] the nationalistic verse which was developing throughout the Arab world, and not in Tunisia alone", is, undoubtedly, also correct.

A great deal of ash-Shābbī's patriotic verse is very strong because our poet hoped to awaken his nation thereby, so that it would rebel against the tyranny and injustice which surrounded it.

1. Kirrā, p. 89.
2. For a discussion of this see Bullāṭa, ar-Rūmāntīgīyīva, p. 167.
"The Will to Live" is a poem full of fervour and hope, written by the poet from within society rather than from outside, as is the case in his more subjective poems. In this poem the poet announces that a nation should shape its own destiny by taking a firm hold on events and shaping them according to their own wishes, although the struggle to do so may be protracted and will, at times, appear hopeless:

The Earth said to me, when I asked, 'O Mother, do you hate mankind?'

'I bless the people of endeavour amongst mankind, and those who delight in mastering danger;

While I curse those who do not move with the times, and are content with a life like that of a stone!'

.......

'The winter is come, the winter of mist, the winter of ice, and the winter of rain,
And the magic is extinguished, the magic of the branches, the magic of the flowers, and the magic of the fruit.'

But, at the end of this long winter of misfortune and despair, a new spring will arrive "like the fluttering of a wing, until its desires rise up and gain victory", and it is symbolic that it is neither Mother Earth (al-ard) nor Nature (al-ghāb) which gives the answer to the poet, but Gloom (ad-dujā), because a people's victory over oppression cannot come from without, if it is to be lasting and effective; it must come from the strong inner potential of a society,

striving towards a mutual aim, just as the poet's answer had to come from the symbol which denotes the darkness of an unjust world, because:

When souls desire life, there is nothing that Fate can do but reply.¹

From this poem and several others, such as "To the People"², and "O Son of My Mother"³, it is clear that ash-Shābbī's commitment towards awakening his country from the passive acceptance of foreign domination never diminished; nor did his energetic, and often hectic, struggle against the constant attacks of ill-health which dogged his life.

For the last five years of his life ash-Shābbī was aware of his impending death, and this brought about an understandable change in his attitude towards death. Although his feelings towards death still included a degree of stylised romanticism, in which death is a beautiful and fulfilling experience, much of the facile description and imagery of his earlier work is replaced by subjective realism.

In his fine poem "In the Shadow of the Valley of Death" we encounter different moods and different attitudes towards death. Firstly, the poet is overcome by frustration and a sense of impatient rebellion, and cries out, "Come, show me the marks of my grave in the still of the gloom, so that I may bury myself." But this soon gives way to meditation on his life, which he sums up in the line, "We have eaten dust until we were bored, and drunk tears until we were full", which leads him back to his original question, "But then where?" Finally, weary of life and his questions, he sighs:

2. Ibid., p. 69-70.
3. Ibid., p. 68.
The blossoms of life fall silently, sadly, boringly at my feet;
The magic of life has dried up, O my weeping heart, so come, let us try death . . . Come.¹

However, his feelings towards death were also metaphysical in their dimensions. In "Hymn to the Mighty or Thus Sang Prometheus" he states that he shall not be defeated, announcing, "I will live, in spite of sickness and foes, like the eagle on the highest peak", and invites life to "Buffet my heart as long as you can, for it will remain [as steadfast] as a solid rock."² But there is also the spiritual angle, and having first prevailed over his corrupt and bitter enemies, he recognises the inevitability of death, when he writes,

Verily, I shall melt in the dawn of eternal beauty, and drink from the pool of lights.³

Thus death is no longer an end, it is a beginning and a continuation at one and the same time because, as he says in "The New Dawn", "Indeed the magic of life is eternal, and without end." At this point death has become a fording place in an uninterrupted process which includes both life and death, and this approach lends an almost supernatural atmosphere to his farewell, and, similarly, to the passing of all men:

2. Ibid., p. 109.
3. Ibid., p. 110.
Farewell! Farewell! O mountains of cares,
O mists of grief! O valleys of Hell!
My boat has passed into the vast ocean,
And I have unfurled the sail. So farewell! Farewell!

From the preceding discussion it is clear that ash-Shābī was a gifted poet, but where does the source of his genius lie? Is it to be found in his ability to assimilate the old and the new from Arabic literature, while allowing himself to digest and utilise the things which he found attractive or suitable from foreign literatures?

Like most romantic poets ash-Shābī, often employed images of light and shade, and indeed excelled in this, so that much of his verse abounds with emotive light imagery, juxtaposed to images of darkness, as in "Hymn to the Mighty":

Living like a tyrant, always looking at the dawn, the beautiful, distant dawn,
Filling my path with apprehension and gloom, and with storms of thorns and pebbles.

Similarly, he employed the rather facile pastoral imagery which abounds in romantic poetry generally, but in a personal manner which draws the reader's attention, and which was still comparatively new to Arabic verse at that time:

2. Ibid., p. 109.
In the beautiful dawn, he [i.e. the poet] sings with the birds, walking as if intoxicated,
Blowing his pipe, while around him the variegated blossoms tremble [with delight].
His hair flows [and] the wind caresses it as if it was silk,
While the trilling birds sing about him, and talk in the tree, of every kind;
And you will see him at the roots, beside the pool, gazing at the intoxicated birds,
Singing amidst the sparrows, or gazing at the twilight of the darkness.¹

As might be expected from a poet whose works are predominantly lyrical, and contain a great deal of pastoral description, words like tuvūr, al-ghāb, nāy, jadwāl and dawh are to be found in almost every poem, while his recurring theme of the spurned poet-prophet caused words like ḍabāb, dujā, asā, turāb, ashwāq and bu’s to proliferate. Ash-Shabbl’s diction is thus usually simple, and one seldom encounters an archaic word or phrase, while his symbols are usually those within the acquaintance of the average literate Arab², making his verse particularly suited to being set to music and sung by popular singers, or by political groups, as happened in the case of his nationalistic verse.

1. Kirrū, p. 64; see also following lines.
2. See for example, "al-Abad as-Saghir", Ibid., p. 87, where he uses the symbol of Iram, the mythological city, built to resemble Paradise from precious metals and jewels.
His verse forms, being lyrical, were also suited to this purpose, especially in view of ash-Shābbī's ability to control European metrical forms, as well as those of the traditional Arabic repertoire. Ash-Shābbī used the structure of the classical ḥasīda in some poems, often sub-dividing them according to his theme and mood, but he also employed stanzaic forms on the western model, such as the couplet, and the quatrain, especially in sustained composition. There is, however, a marked preference for the Arabic metres in his verse, and he often chose to use the monorhyme and the monometre in stanzaic form, although he also employed the multirhyme with the monorhyme. Indeed it was this inspired ability to manipulate rhyme that lends the haunting musical note to ash-Shābbī's poetry, so that his verse lingers in the mind of the reader, and makes him turn to the source of these melodies, asking for more.

But have we found the secret of his greatness? Is it to be found in his masterly control of metrics, in his musical ear for effective but simple diction and pastoral imagery, in his love and dedication towards his homeland, his mystical approach to mankind's existence, or in the sincere expression of his hopes and suffering? Perhaps it lies in all of these, but it is also in something less tangible, and far more elusive; in the sensitivity and character of the poet himself, for "even if we separate [the words and phrases of

1. For example of classical ḥasīda format, see Ibid., p. 77-80; and for sub-divided ḥasīda, see p. 106-8 and p. 86.
2. See Ibid., p. 91-95; and p. 96-101.
5. Ibid., p. 111-2.
6. See the statement made by ‘Īsā Na‘ūrī, Ibid., p. 56.
his verse] from their magical metric and poetic arrangement we would not lose the hidden secret which flows into the soul."\(^1\)

Ash-Shābbī was a perfect poet. He loved beauty, he loved life, he loved his homeland, he loved existence . . . and he loved freedom . . . This love is above pain, above oppression and above jealousy; it was a love which crossed the borders of Tunisia to Egypt, ash-Shām and Iraq, and was finally [destined for] all mankind, and [for all] the world, without boundaries.\(^2\)

In fact the real secret is hidden somewhere amongst the thickets of his mechanical poetic genius and his fine poetic sensitivity, and is, as in the case of all great art, undefinable.

Perhaps the best tribute to this Tunisian poet who was to prove so influential by virtue of both his poetry and his criticism, was that of Salāma Mūsā, who said,

Those who read the Tunisian poet, Abū 1-Qāsim ash-Shābbī, will not only admire his poetry, but will love it. For he lived his short life in the pain of sickness, and awaiting death, yet he did not give in, for he challenged Fate and determined to live his life . . .

So I believe that, were ash-Shābbī still alive amongst us today, he would be the greatest poet of

\(^1\) Statement made by Muḥammad Fahlī, see Kirrā, p. 183.
\(^2\) Statement of Ibrāhīm Nāfī, see Ibid., p. 212.
the Arab lands, in which the lute of poetry has
been smashed. ¹

Whether or not the lute had indeed been shattered will become
evident in the next chapter, which is devoted to the works of the
three great modern romantic poets of the Arabic language most
influential on as-Sayyāb, and in the section on as-Sayyāb himself.

¹. See Kirrū, p. 56.
Before moving on to study the various aspects of as-Sayyāb's romanticism it is necessary to examine which of the poets were to prove a great influence upon as-Sayyāb, and upon the whole generation of poets who started publishing after the Second World War.

As-Sayyāb himself tended to minimise the influence of his immediate predecessors upon him, and even went so far as to claim, "I admire several modern Arab poets, but I have not been particularly influenced by one of them, because this admiration arose after I had formed my own literary style and independent poetic personality, so that I view them as colleagues rather than masters."¹ Such naïve claims are rather typical of as-Sayyāb's critical statements, and especially those of his more tender years as a poet, and it is thus not surprising to find him making contradictory claims about modern Arab poets and their effects upon him. For example, he did acknowledge the debt of his generation, and indeed his own debt, to the Iraqi poet Muḥammad Mahdī al-Jawāhīrī (1900 —), when he said, "Al-Jawāhīrī is the master of the whole generation of Iraqi poets, and indeed both myself and many other young poets owe a great debt to him"², while also feeling compelled to admit that he had fallen under the influence of ʿAlī Maḥmūd Ṭāḥā (1902–1949), after that of al-Buḥtūrī (821–897): "Al-Buḥtūrī was the first poet to influence me, then I fell under the influence of the Egyptian poet, ʿAlī Maḥmūd Ṭāḥā, for a while."³

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1. ʿAbīta, Maḥmūd, Badr Shākir as-Sayyāb wa-l-Ḥaraka ash-Shīrīyya al-Jadīda fi l-ʿIrāq (Baghdad, 1965), p. 82.
2. Ibid., p. 85.
3. Ibid., p. 82.
Yet it is obvious that several classical poets cast their literary shadow upon as-Sayyāb, notably Abū Tammām (804/6-845/6), Ibn ar-Rūmī (836-896), Miḥyār ad-Ḍaylamī (d. 1037), Ibn al-Faṭḥ (1182-1235), al-Mutanabbi (915-965), and the famous Kitāb ash-Shi‘r wa-sh-Shu‘ārā’ of Ibn Qutayba (828-889). In fact his friends often found him reading outside a café during his student days in Baghdad, "with a cup of tea in front of him, from which he sipped, before returning to reading the diwān of al-Mutanabbi, Abū Tammām, al-Buḥṭurī, or another of the great masters; although he was particularly fond of Abū Tammām."^2

Perhaps the influence of al-Jawāhirī is not so far removed from that of the great classical poets of the earlier epochs when one considers his neo-classical ideals and fine control of the diction, metrics and music of the Arabic language, and there is no doubt that as-Sayyāb himself sought to control his native language in a similar manner. In this quest he perhaps wished to copy what he found admirable in the works of the ancients at an early stage in his life, so that later it became an integral part of his individualistic and personal poetic style. In this way the verse of the two contemporaries, Abū Tammām and al-Buḥṭurī, helped to deepen as-Sayyāb’s instinctive use of Arabic diction, so that, while it is true that his admiration

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1. For further information about these poets see as follows:

2. *‘Alba‘a*, p. 9.

for the former led him to imitate his diction, rhythms and abundant use of similes to create resonance, there is no doubt that the less sonorous and ornamental verse of the latter also cast its spell over the young poet by its fluidity of expression and polished simplicity.

The descriptive poetry of Ibn ar-Rūmī probably also attracted the young as-Sayyāb, whose talent for such verse is obvious in even his earliest poems, and in his first published diwān, Aḥār Dḥābīla. Likewise, the highly original poetry to be found in the diwān of the Sufi poet Ibn al-Fāriq (1181-1235), with its often, although not always, sparing use of the intricate rhetorical devices of its era, and the delightful lyric aspects of some of his odes and mystic poems, also extended their influence over the young poet, and perhaps also assisted him in his search for forthright, but poetically pleasing, expression for his emotions and views.

When we add his immeasurable respect for al-Mutanabbī and al-Ma‘ārīf, and his readings in the books of Ibn Qutayba, we discover how as-Sayyāb achieved his control of the metrics and diction of Arabic, which is obvious from his earliest works, although, as he himself noted, these were not without metrical errors. The religiously motivated verse of Mihyār ad-Daylamī, the pious Shi'ite, perhaps kindled as-Sayyāb's sense of duty, while the former's taut phrases and imagery might well have helped as-Sayyāb further in his search for precise linguistic expression.

It is also possible that the 'Udhri poets also left their imprint on this young Baṣrī poet, growing up in an era when the poetry of the

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1. In al-Mūmis al-‘Amyā, as-Sayyāb added a footnote to explain an allusion to al-Ma‘ārīf; Diwān, 1, p. 512.
Mahjar of the U. S. A., and of Abū Shāfī's Apollo group was being widely publicised, whose romantic lovesick verse shared some common aspects with those of the early 'Udhri poets. Indeed, the love poetry of the Mahjar and Apollo groups had much in common with what Gibb so accurately described as the "idealizing, languishing and hopeless love"\(^1\) suffered by Jamīl (d. 701)\(^2\), and his followers. However, although this was very much in evidence in as-Sayyāb's juvenilia and in Azhār Dhābila, it was soon replaced by a more introverted and analytical approach to love and its pitfalls and ecstacies in Asāḥīr, and subsequent volumes.

Turning to more modern poets, while it can be argued that the fine verse and melancholy love lyrics of ash-Shābbī are echoed by that of as-Sayyāb in Azhār Dhābila\(^3\), it was that of 'Alī Maḥmūd Ṭāhā and Ilyās Abū Shabaka (1903-49) which were to have a clearer and more lasting effect upon as-Sayyāb, and indeed Nizār Qabbānī (1923 —), while that of Ibrāhīm Nājī (1893-1953) had little influence as regards content, its impact, as far as love lyrics are concerned, being confined more to the mechanical aspects of verse composition.

As we have seen as-Sayyāb, himself, confessed his respect for the poetry of the Egyptian mathematician ‘Alī Maḥmūd Ṭāhā, but, before analysing the connection between the verse of these two poets, it is helpful to see why both were so influenced by the same romantic ideology, in spite of the twenty-four year gap in their ages. Firstly, it should be pointed out that there was a definite time-lag between

\(1\) Gibb, p. 45.
\(3\) See al-As'ad, Muhammad Ismā'all, "as-Sayyāb wa-s-Sīrā' ma'a z-Zamān", al-Aqlām (Baghdad, January, 1966), p. 65-78; see p. 67.
the literary trends of Egypt and Greater Syria and those of Iraq, because of the political and social circumstances of the latter. The two former states had been open to European influences from the early nineteenth century onwards, but were beginning to be more noticeably influenced, as regards literature, in the early years of this century, when the Arab poets were beginning to feel the need for change. They felt that while the classical masters and their Neo-classical followers were great and gifted poets, capable of raising the Arabic language to pinnacles of excellence, their styles and forms were no longer relevant to the requirements of modern times, nor to those of the poet himself, nor his audience. They wanted a poetry through which they could express their fears, hopes and desires, as well as discuss their nationalistic and social aspirations, without resorting to the rhetorical and verbal contortions of classical Arabic verse, and without its strained, and often obscure, vocabulary and allusions. Since European literature, and especially that of the English and French languages, was readily available and understandable to the new littérateurs of Arab society, and especially to those belonging to the middle classes, it is hardly surprising that they should turn to these literatures for inspiration. In this way numerous translations began to appear in the newspapers and literary magazines, with the poetry of certain poets, and indeed certain poems, appearing again and again. Thus both Nājī and ʻAlī Maḥmūd Tāhā translated the poem *Le Lac* of Lamartine¹, and several other poems belonging to Musset and Baudelaire, and Keats and Shelley, which were published and eagerly

digested by the younger generation of the day, as were the translations from Palgrave’s *The Golden Treasury* and from Shakespeare.

However, these poets did not detach themselves totally from their classical heritage, and there are obvious remnants of the classical idiom in their romantic verse, although this was, naturally, partly due to tendencies stemming from their milieu and their education. Thus, although Ţāhā, Nājī, Abū Shabaka, Abū Māqī and ash-Shābbī were romantic poets and admired European romantic verse greatly, often copying its prototypes, they were also extremely proficient as regards the manipulation of classical form and its lofty language and precise construction, to a greater or less extent.

As-Sayyāb too was a master of classical form, and maintained his adherence to classical linguistic construction throughout his life, along with his immense respect for the delicate precision of Arabic diction and the devices of simile, metaphor, allusion and repetition, and, indeed, for its rhythmic nuances. Thus, although he did much to further the cause of his famous *ash-shi‘r al-hurr*, and invented many new verse forms, even his most modernistic verse has a certain quality which reminds us of the carefully measured rhythms of the classical *qaṣīda*, as can be seen in "Hal Kāna Ḥubban", the poem which is held, by some, to have been the first real poem in *ash-shi‘r al-hurr*:

```plaintext
هل تُسِمَّينَ الْأَلْمَ؟ هَيَّاً.
أَمَّمْ بِئْسًا؟ إِلَٰهُ أَيْنَ؟
أَمْ عِزَّاً؟
بَاَذَا يُكُونُ الْحُبُّ؟ نَوْمًا وَأَبَاسًا؟

امسآد الضوء الورع عَلَى
موسَخَةٍ ما يَلَايِ، اِنْ يَدْوَبَ
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But why should romanticism have proved such a profound influence upon the tastes of as-Sayyāb, just as it had previously been upon his elders, Tāhā, Nājī, and Abū Shabaka? In the early twentieth century Iraqi literary society was still the bastion of Neo-classicism, and there was very little modern criticism and even less poetry being translated and published, partly due to Iraq's extremely tenuous links with Europe, and even with the western Arab world, and partly due to the lethargy of the poets themselves. It was, therefore, not until the 1920s and 1930s that translations began to appear in significant numbers, as well as the works of the poets of the Mahjar and Apollo. The young Iraqi poets fell under the sway of such literature almost immediately, especially as the political and social climate of Iraq at that time, and the presence of the British, frustrated the young intelligensia, who sought for an artistic outlet for their feelings, and found it in romantic verse. Indeed, as Buland al-Ḥaydarī said,

The artists and poets amongst us tried to reproduce something of the unrest, impatience and disappointment

1. Diwān, 1, p. 101-3. The rhythmic precision is due to the emphasis placed on the foot, the taflā, which prevents the verse from developing amorphously. For a discussion of the classical elements in as-Sayyāb's poetry see Khayyāt, Jalāl, "al-Jumla ash-Shīrīyya wa-'Uqdat ar-Rawwād", in Afāq 'Arabiyya (March, 1978), p. 53-55.
which had accumulated in their souls, in a literature or art which could establish new values and new attitudes towards life, while conforming with their feelings and emotional understanding of the universal problems which surrounded them.¹

In this manner romanticism came belatedly to Iraq, when its power was already waning in the rest of the Arab world, and, indeed, many Iraqi poets have continued to compose romantic verse right up until the present, while others continued to write in the romantic vein into the 1950s and 1960s²; and, undoubtedly, one of the strongest impressions upon most of these poets came from the three famous Apollo poets 'Alī Maḥmūd Ṭāhā, Ibrāhīm Nājī, and Ilyās Abū Shabaka.

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'Alī Maḥmūd Ṭāhā

Indeed as-Sayyāb's respect for 'Alī Maḥmūd Ṭāhā led him to send a copy of a poem of at least one thousand verses (abyāt) to the great poet. As-Sayyāb claimed that this poem had been written under the influence of Baudelaire, but, as we know that as-Sayyāb knew little or nothing of the French language, it seems more probable that he had composed it under the influence of 'Alī Maḥmūd Ṭāhā, or of Baudelaire

2. For details see M.A.P., p. 228–230; discussion of the romanticism of Nāzik al-Malā‘ika. See also Boullata, "Badr Shākir as-Sayyāb and the Free Verse Movement", I.J.M.E.S. (1970), vol. 1, p. 249–50 for a more general discussion of Iraqi romantic verse. See also Chapter III.
as shown through his criticism and translation. Tāhā had, of course, a special admiration for this French poet, and especially for *Les Fleurs du Mal*, which, it appears, had prompted as-Sayyāb to write his poem, which explored the tensions and contradictions between lust and pure love, the love of the body and the love of the soul. Unfortunately, Tāhā did not exert himself in this matter and, on his death, it was finally discovered that the manuscript had been lost, so that this poem has had to be gathered together from notebooks and short sections, which are but fragments of the original poem *Bāyn ar-Rūḥ wa-l-Jasad*.

In fact the whole of as-Sayyāb's generation did well to study carefully the work of 'Alī Maḥmūd Tāhā, influenced as it was by the literary heritage of the Arabs, augmented by his knowledge of western literatures, which lent a wider and more profound spectrum to his compositions. For, as Nāzīk al-Malā'ika has pointed out, "'Alī Maḥmūd Tāhā is a poet who can be read by intellectuals, who find it important that modern poetry should contain something [important] as regards depth of thought and profound meaning", while he also pleases those who "give prestige to the traditional values of classical Arabic poetry... so that they can choose him without this lessening his favoured position among the devotees of modern verse."

Although Tāhā was influenced by French and English poetry generally, this is clearer in his content than in his forms, although the rhythm structures of European literatures were, undoubtedly, a source of

1. See ar-Ramāḍī, Mutrān, p. 325.
2. See Iḥsān 'Abbās, as-Sayyāb, p. 58.
5. Ibid., p. 8.
inspiration. For, although he employed quatrains and other interesting verse forms, he tended to base them on the classical monorhyme and monometre, with or without the hemistich, and on the muwashshah. It is perhaps the experimentation carried on within the above-mentioned boundaries, and his knowledge and control of classical Arabic prosody, that makes Tahā's verse so musical, as is the case in his lyric piece "Fi sh-Shitā'," where his description of the girl is enhanced by the rhythm of the poem:


But what of the influence of the west, so idealised by Tahā? There can be no doubt that the most important European influence upon

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1. e.g.: "Sīrānīdā Miṣrīyya", Diwān T., p. 301, which is subtitled "Ughniya Layālī n-Nil", and is based on the format of the Italian serenade.
2. See "al-Qamar al-‘Ashiq" (trans.) M.A.P., p. 142 and Diwān T., p. 231; and "Qubla", Ibid., p. 49.
3. For example of poem in monorhyme and monometre divided into sections see "Mīlād Shā‘īr", Ibid., p. 11. Another poem, "Layālī Kulūvūbatra", p. 471, has an interesting format: it is made up of stanzas of four lines followed by two rhyming couplets which are in a different metre, the final line of which is constant at the end of each verse, so that the last couplet always rhymes with "galbā", while the rhyme of the first couplet changes independently.
5. Diwān T., p. 263. See also "Hulm Layla", p. 258.
Tāhā and his generation, was that of the romantics, and especially Shelley, whose *Prometheus Unbound* drew Tāhā's praise, Lamartine and Baudelaire, while Paul Verlaine, John Masefield and A. de Vigny also interested him enough for him to translate some of their works. In view of his liking for Shelley and his contemporaries, it is hardly surprising that we find clear expression of metaphysical doubts in Tāhā's verse, and the aura of unknown spheres and modes of existence, so typical of the great romantic sensibility, irrespective of time and place.

Surprisingly, perhaps, his constant philosophical questioning of the universe constituted one of the causes for his extreme interest in sexual, and other sensual enjoyments. In an enlightening introduction to one poem he said of Khayyam, that he was one of those poets who tried to probe the secrets of the universe and glimpse the unknown . . . but were denied their object because of the limitations of the human condition. Consequently they plunged into grief and sorrow, which drove them to seek comfort and consolation from their powerlessness and despair in the pleasures of wine and women.²

It is probably such alienation that led Tāhā down the same path, especially as he claimed,

1. e.g. Ayyūb, "FI l-Kharīf", p. 173; "Awdat al-Mallāh", p. 28; and "Bayt Rā'īn", p. 42.
2. See M.A.P., p. 142 for this translation, and *Dīwān T.* p. 236 for text.
I suffer from the disease of alienation, imagining that I am from another people, or another land, and I never cease from longing for unknown places and leanings towards distant lands, so that sometimes a [great] desire overtakes me and I wish I could fly away, and imagine that my heart, when it beats, is a bird longing to take flight, but it is surrounded by a cage which prevents it from escaping.¹

Understandably, Tāhā was deeply interested in the aspirations of mankind towards knowledge of the Unseen, and, in "at-Timthāl"², which is subtitled "Qissat al-Amal al-Insānī", we find the poet discussing Fate and man's need for a belief in something outwith himself. The fact that Tāhā felt it necessary to expound his intention in a prose introduction warns us that this poem is intended as more than the subjective monologue, which it might otherwise be taken for:

Man creates hope, moulding its idol from his heart and his spirit, never ceasing to depend upon it, finding new ways of representing it, polishing it and endowing it with life, its joys and its beauties in [his] imagination. But time passes and the idol remains inanimate mud and deaf stone, until the flame of youth is extinguished in the blood of the ardent creator, and he feels his years. With old

¹. See ar-Ramāḍī, Mutrān, p. 318.
². Diwān T., p. 313 ff.
age and weakness he seeks asylum in the temple of his dreams, extolling the idol, but the idol does not move, nor is the beautiful dream validated. So the nights ruin this temple and storm the idol, reducing it to rubble. Thus human despair calls out for help, while Fate pursues its course.

In this poem the poet indulges in a Keatsian search for the source of all romantic inspiration, Beauty:

كلما شمتُ بارئًا من جمال
جرت فى الرى اشفى طرى

which always manages to elude him, in spite of his tireless endeavours:

كل يوم أقول: في العين، لك
lastic القلب من عذاب وضيق

and his knowledge of its existence:

حيري ا، الليل! وما الليل إلا
عشب الضوء، في السراج المنفوذ

صباح السمس لا يعلم عذابي
ما سكى النار، في دم وأريقي

1

Tāhā created such supernatural and mysterious stages for his poetry by means of atmosphere, rather than metaphor or imagery,

which tend to be predominantly pictorial in Tāhā's work, as is the case in "Hazīmat ash-Shayṭān":

\[\begin{align*}
\text{بكلفني، وعندما نستيقظ نتساءل:} & \\
\text{ما الذي تجده في جوانبنا:} & \\
\text{هل نشعر أننا بألف ليلة:} & \\
\text{أي كواكب:} & \\
\text{ولا ذلك الظلم المنقول:} & \\
\text{الجبال}: & \\
\text{لا تزال ثابتة:} & \\
\text{والمنارة}: & \\
\text{لا تضيء:} & \\
\text{لم يرجعوا}: & \\
\text{إلى الأبد:} & \\
\text{في كوكبنا:} & \\
\text{أي كواكب:} & \\
\end{align*}\]

Indeed his ability to create such atmosphere is probably the most noticeable facet of his work, and depends on his imaginative faculties and precise control of diction, so that the reader is easily prepared for what is to follow. In "al-Mūṣiqiyya al-‘Ammā" the reader is introduced to the beauty of the world and its grandeur, but is soon reminded of its shortcomings and the suffering endured by some of mankind, which is later specified as the beautiful, but blind musician, who had fired Tāhā's imagination:

\[\begin{align*}
\text{إذا ما طاف بالبرق:} & \\
\text{ وإذا ما أتت الريح:} & \\
\text{ وإذا ما انفتح المنبر:} & \\
\text{لا تهم بارئ:} & \\
\text{لا ترسوه:} & \\
\text{في الزهرة البيضاء:} & \\
\end{align*}\]

This talent for creating the appropriate atmosphere for his poetic interpretation of existence and its events is perhaps at its most obvious when he discusses Nature, a theme which pervades his verse in one form or another. His deep love of Nature led him to widespread use of personification, and also to casting his emotions

1. Diwān Tāhā, p. 663, in which he relates the story of the Hijra to Medina.
2. Ibid., p. 340.
and attitudes upon even its most lifeless forms, although he stopped short of actual empathy. At its most simple his description of Nature takes on a certain delicacy which is extremely pleasant:

1

while, in the poem "al-Qamar al-'Ashiq" the complete poem is intensely powerful, dealing with a lecherous moon, endowed with human qualities which make him quite capable of seducing the girl who has rejected the poet's protestations of love. It is probably this personification that leads critics to see this poem as one of Tāhā's most sensual works:

2

Similarly, the symbolism employed in the poem "al-Khayāl" rendered his description extremely sensual, and results in an immediate impact on the reader:

3

However his descriptions are not always sensually inclined, because Tāhā also tended to allude to his emotions and complaints

1. Diwan T. 52.
2. Ibid., p. 231.
3. Ibid., p. 311.
through the medium of Nature, by falling into the pathetic fallacy of humanising them, and this is particularly true of his experiences in love, which is, of course, one of the most compelling motivations of man's existence.¹ In a poem called "Ughniya Rifiyya" he combined Nature and his imaginative picture of his beloved perfectly, so that the poet, his beloved and Nature all partake equally in his thoughts:

Again, in "al-Mūṣiqiywa al-‘Amyr" he discusses how Nature and its enchantment mixed with the musician, who has attracted his thoughts, combine in his imagination:

1. In the poem "al-Mūṣiqiywa al-‘Amyr" Tēhē himself pronounced:

2. Ibid., p. 53.

3. Ibid., p. 342.
Nature was probably Tāhā's deepest love and is one of the dominant themes of his poetic output, and is, as we have seen, treated with great charm and precision:

Although Nature is here concerned with more than love and the subjective feelings of the poet, and is indeed partaking in the national and international experiences of Egypt under the British occupation, Nature is more often linked with thoughts of wine, women and song in his verse, and particularly with his high hopes and subsequent feelings of despair and alienation, as is the case with romantics generally. In the poem "Qubla" he talks first of the joys of love:

but then recognises that separation and pain are inevitable, in spite of the present pleasure:

1. Diwan T., p. 643.
The attraction of women in Tāhā’s poetry is, as one might expect, often portrayed in sensual terms:

لا تحناه روح ذلك الحب
إن هذا المرح من عنبي!!

and Tāhā’s women are often described as temptresses, who tease and reprimand the poet relentlessly, and, as in the qasīda "al-Warda as-Safra‘", the poet has to refrain from giving in to his desires, although the true nature of the rose which he forbids the girl to pluck is never explicitly stated:

قلت الغري لي باهبية، نظرقي
إن إبدل المسى من أهواي
لينى زين الناس بي، واتق
سما للمسى والغيره المحبة

although we can surmise its nature, when we discover that the poet announces that he begs her forgiveness, but is afraid of public censure:

1. Diwān Tāhā, p. 49-51. For another example see "ash-Shawq al-‘A’id", p. 570.
2. Ibid., p. 263.
3. Ibid., p. 737.
In another poem he has to admit to past affairs and his attitudes towards his various lovers, in a cunningly devised poem set in the form of a dialogue between himself and a woman, and called simply "Su‘āl wa-Jawāb":

`السأئلني: وهل أساءت شئي؟
وكم حشوة لك اوخلته؟
فتعل لها وقد همت بكاسي
إلى سعتين راحما النيله...`

`قلوب قاسيات تعنها
وموئ شاعرية نبيله

while, in "Imra‘a" he again reveals the internal tensions between his desires and feelings of propriety:

`والملت ثم عصبت، ثم وحدت
بديل لا عن ذلة وتفامي
لكن ذلك إن فطرت تصلت
ذ نباك تسي في باروع مافي

Yet, Tāhā’s descriptions of women often transcend the corporeal limits of the senses, and this would seem to confirm al-Malā‘ika's belief that "sensuousness and the search for pleasure were accidents in the life of 'Alī Mahmūd Tāhā", especially when one remembers his

2. Ibid., p. 653.
previously stated comment on the life of Omar Khayyam, although it is difficult to agree that his most sensuous verse is always tempered with the spiritual and intellectual aspects of womankind, as al-Malā'ika would have us believe. Thus, in "Qubla" she is made into a sort of refuge, wherein the poet can forget the world and its troubles:

\[ قبلاً من تُفرك السموك تُحو كل ما بي وتوريني على الناس وعن دنيا العذاب. \]

while, in "al-Muṣāfiyya al-'Amya"", his portrayal of this beautiful and gifted woman so pathetically disabled, reveals both understanding and compassion towards her solitary plight:

\[ ومن أدم الله الحبوب؟ او ماصورة الصبر؟ \]

Again, in the poem "Imra'a", both the sensual and the practically supernormal character of woman is mentioned by Tāhā, although it is devoid of the personal commitment obvious in the previous poem, and is much more concerned with external features and with her immediate effect upon the poet:

\[ الفاك لست أران الأمعة علويه الإشراف والبايض. \]

and her attitude towards him:

1. Diwān T., p. 49.
2. Ibid., p. 343.
Towards the end of his life ɀāhā became obsessed with the physical aspects of life, as his own strength and sexuality decreased, as is shown in poems like "ash-Shawq al-‘A'id", where he looks back upon his past life, and sums it up in the last stanza:

However, ɀāhā, like Baudelaire, saw the sufferings of love, and of life generally, as a cleansing influence, as he pointed out in "at-Timthāl":

1. Diwān T., p. 653.
2. Ibid., p. 572.
3. Ibid., p. 318.
and, although this poem ends on a sombre note and his poetry is often concerned with suffering in life and love, it usually has at least a grain of optimism, be it passive or active. This is, of course, typical of the attitudes of romantic artists and thinkers generally, whose attitudes so often pivot around the joys and miseries of love, and man's suffering in this world of harsh realities, and hopes of either his eventual perfectability or salvation.

In the same way Tāhā's attitude towards the poet and his poetry reflects the ideals of romantic literature, and especially that of French literature, and its portrayal of the poète maudit, who is usually an ethereal philosopher unheeded by his people, and a prophet ill-suited to deal with the earthly affairs and apathy of his fellow men. In fact, as al-Malā‘ika has claimed, no modern Arabic poet "has deified poetry and venerated the poet to the same extent as ‘Alī Mahmūd Tāhā . . . and it is as if poetry is the dearest thing to his heart and his spirit, so that he sings its praises and discusses it and [actually] lives it."¹

In his poem "Hanat ash-Shu‘arâ‘" Tāhā explores the nature of the poet and his compositions, and states that poetry is a matter of non-conscious revelation:

But the true essence and form of poetry and art escapes him, and so the poem draws to a close with an important and rhetorical metaphysical

1. al-Malā‘ika, ‘Alī Mahmūd Tāhā, p. 227. This is again reminiscent of Baudelaire, who saw art as the only means to Beauty in this world, and the only path to the Ideal.
question, which is put into the mouth of the woman described in the poem:

"أحىت السماء، تبسم: أي روح كان أم جسد؟"

Thus poetry is an amorphous but holy art form, but what of the human being who receives and transduces this revelation into poetry? For Ṭahā the poet is accepted as an intermediary between God and his creation, and, unlike earlier Arab romantic poets, this is assumed as unquestionable, and is nowhere defended against criticism. Perhaps this is nowhere more clearly stated than in his famous poem "Milād Shā'ir", where the birth is described in prophetical and sublime imagery:

"بيت الأرض كالشعل السني
فِي مَّالِعِ السِّهْلِ بِسَرِيٍّ...
وَطَسَاءُ هُبْرَةً: يَلُكْ حَل
الينا في صورة الأمن;

This poet is indeed no mere mortal, he is a hallowed supernatural being sent to free man from his fetters:

"لا يَثِلُ كم اخُذُكُمْ المَومِيَ فِي الْأَثْوَامَ
وَنَكْمُ جَنَّ بهَتَابَةٍ شَاعِرُ
وَلَا يَثِلُ كمْ سَبِّبَ مَأْتِرً

1. Diwān Ṭaḥā, p. 482 and 484 resp.."
The poet is also entrusted with the task of giving voice to his feelings, and to expound the beauty and love of the existence, created by its Lord and Maker, who bestows blessings upon mankind through the poet himself:

1. ايا الشعراء أعزمو قيامكم ودعي ربا دعا الوجود وباسكم

Tāhā also scrutinises the mechanical aspects of poetic composition, and describes the poet as one who is deeply and constantly concerned with the raw materials of poetry:

2. عشتنا الجد وعندنا الصور وسمنا للشعر مباوضا وغضت له التحالفات

But does the poet's audience appreciate these exertions on the part of the poet? Unfortunately, it has neither understood nor heeded his message:

3. سوى شاعر في زوالا الحياة أكب على كاسب الوحي في الليالي الاخيرة في الميول المنتظرة

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1. Diwan T., p. 11-12, p. 22 and p. 25 resp.
2. Ibid., p. 310.
3. Ibid., p. 312.
and the poet has to resign himself to patience and await the appointed time, when his words shall be heeded, according to this poem. But such hope is nowhere present in "Ghurfat ash-Shā'ir":

في الكرى، نضب النور في النور،
والدمع في النموذج دمياً نضب
سيماً ن考え الاضيأ وليلة الليل البور.

Here this world is a madhouse and is most unsuitable for the gifted and sensitive poet:

لست تجاري من الحياة بباحش،
لست فناناً من الفن والشعر،
إنها للمجهول والخليط والزب،
ولست للشاعر الموهوب.

The poet is thus the true poète maudit, ignored by all, suffering in solitary silence. The picture given in his qasida, "ash-Shā'ir", dedicated to Ibrahim Najji, is of a gifted poet, who is ever-watchful, and to whom sublimity is revealed so as to enable him to compose verses which will prove eternal, seated in meditation, suffering from the pains and tribulations of life, surrounded by sympathetic Nature:


1. ديوان ت.، ص. 40.
As we have seen, Taha often resorted to religious language when discussing the poet and poetry, especially in "Milk Sha'ir", in which the poet's birth cannot fail to remind the reader of the Biblical narrations concerning the birth of Christ, and that of other prophets, and, as M. M. Badawi has pointed out, this was something new in the Arabic poetry of the time: "Taha uses the language in which only the birth of the Prophet has hitherto been traditionally celebrated in Muslim religious or mystic verse." He also indicated that the conclusion is obviously an echo from Musset's "Nuits de Mai." Of course, Taha himself, as has already been mentioned, admitted his debt to this great French romantic poet and translated several of his works, but there can be no doubt that he was also drawing upon the whole spectrum of his poetic experience in creating this unheeded prophet stance for the poet in this poem and others, thus introducing a new concept into the mainstream of modern Arabic verse, which was...

2. Ibid., p. 11-25.
unfortunately, soon to become hackneyed, in the hands of poets of lesser genius.

Finally, ʿṬālāʾ also employed various types of symbolism and mythology in his poetry, such as his use of Greek mythology in "Ḥānat ash-Shuʿarāʾ" and Arwāh wa-Ashbāḥ, while also drawing inspiration from his native Egypt in Uṣniyat ar-Riyāḥ al-ʿArbaʿ, which is based on a fragment of an ancient Egyptian song. Ṭāhā also adopted Biblical or Qurʾānic imagery in his verse, beyond the obvious echoes of the Prophetic revelations in his attitude towards the poet, as can be seen in poems like "Qubla", "Ṣuʿāl wa-Jawāb", "al-ʿUṣūḥiyya al-ʿAmrāʾ", "Ḥāzinat ash-Shayṭān" and others. However any study of Ṭāhā's use of symbolism, and any influences in this sphere upon as-Sayyāb, belongs to the chapter on Symbolism, and will not, therefore, be discussed in depth here, although symbolism is, of course, an integral and vital part of romantic literature and cannot be totally separated from it without great damage to the ideal as a whole.

Thus, to sum up, Ṭāhā was chiefly an extremely gifted lyric poet, whose best poems tended to be short compositions, and whose talent was not really suited to lengthy and sustained poetic activity. The secret of this lyricism lies in his precise diction and manipulation of the Arabic language and its metrical eccentricities, and in his willingness to adopt anything which he found suitable from other cultures, and especially European literature. In the field of metrical expertise he would adopt anything which attracted him from western

literary modes and combine it with his profound understanding of Arabic conventions, thus forming pleasing stanzaic pieces, which bore the stamp of experimentation while remaining, basically, within the boundaries of Arabic metres and rhythms.

Yet this alone could not suffice to make Tāhā the great lyricist that he is without something more, and it is, perhaps, his ability to create a life-like atmosphere with words in verse, without much assistance from non-pictorial imagery, that raises him above other similar poets. As we have seen personification played an important role in this, as did his power to choose the appropriate and evocative vocabulary for any particular poem, and, indeed, for each different experience. It is maybe this love for accurate language and the truthful expression of his thoughts and feelings that attracted Tāhā to symbolism and its attendant forms, although it must be pointed out that Tāhā tends not to be at his best when he ventures into the realms of symbolic composition. Perhaps the reason for this was his doubts concerning the ability of his reader to understand his intentions and meanings, which led him to preface such poems with prose introductions, explaining the nature of, and parts played by the mythological characters or symbols concerned. But it seems that the reason for this apparent unrest in his mythological and symbolic poetry is more deeply seated in the very personality of the poet himself, because Tāhā tended towards romanticism in his heart, no matter how much he admired the often obscure "symbolisme" of the French school. Thus, no matter how much symbolist ideas ruled his intellect\(^1\), he could not

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1. For a contrary view of the excellence of Tāhā's symbolic verse, see al-Malā'ika, 'Alī Mahmūd Tāhā, p. 164 ff.
reconcile his reading in symbolic literature and theories with his own practise, and the task of conveying the more correct use of symbols was left to the next generation.

Finally, Tāhā's romanticism, like that of his great contemporaries, should not be viewed as a mere escape from reality, because while the bulk of his poems are concerned with extremely subjective experiences, he was also very much involved with the political and social struggles of his people and, indeed, of the Arabs generally, and also wrote several elegies and eulogies, among which we find some of his best poems, and some of which are addressed to politicians and other public figures. Tāhā was perhaps not multazim in the more normal use of the word in modern literary circles, in which it denotes a commitment to a particular cause or clearly delineated party, but he was committed to his nation, and, by expressing his own attitudes and hopes and fears, he sought to throw light upon those of his generation generally, which is, after all is said and done, all that any realistic poet can hope to achieve.

1. For examples, see "Ilā T-Tabīʿa al-Miṣriyya", Diwān T., p. 643; and "Yawm Filasṭīn", p. 753; "Ilā Abnāʿ ash-Shārqa", p. 745, etc.

2. For examples of elegies, see "Ḥāfiz Ibrāhīm", Ibid., p. 166; and "Mawt ash-Shāʾir", p. 337. For eulogies, see "Ṣadā ʿI-Waḥy", p. 358; and "ash-Shāʾir", p. 513, etc.
The Influence of 'Alī Mahmūd Tāhā upon Badr Shākir as-Sayyāb

It is always difficult to judge the influence of one poet upon another, and this is rendered especially difficult in this case by the similar emotional and psychological tendencies of the two poets concerned. While there can be no doubt that as-Sayyāb admired Tāhā greatly and sought to copy him, there are also several facets to his verse which, while resembling those of the Egyptian poet, grew out of his own Iraqi literary environment and his own poetic inclinations. Thus, we shall first discuss the sides of as-Sayyāb's poetry which, although perhaps bearing the mark of Tāhā's style, were also typical of the stream of development in Iraqi literary circles at that time.

As has already been stated Tāhā was greatly interested in metrical experimentation and as-Sayyāb was, obviously, similarly inclined. However, it is unlikely that Tāhā alone can be claimed as a predominant influence in this sphere for several reasons. Firstly, the Iraqi poet az-Zahawī (1863-1936) had already attempted to compose rhymeless verse, which he called ash-shīr al-mursal, and invent new metres, although he was essentially a Neo-classicist, while the romantic poets of the Mahjar and the East had already been searching for new forms of poetic expression. Secondly, as-Sayyāb himself claimed that the metrics of English literature had had a profound effect upon him, causing him to base his metre on the foot (taffīla), rather than upon any of the

1. Before continuing it should be pointed out that any influence upon as-Sayyāb's symbolism will not be studied here as it belongs more properly to the chapter on symbolism.
traditional metres of Arabic verse:

I have noticed in my studies of English poetry that it is the "beat" [ad-∂arba], which is the equivalent of our taf'ila [that is important] ... and that the "line" [as-satr] or al-bayt is made up of similar beats [which may change] to another "beat" throughout the rest of the abvāt, while also differing as to number ... in this way it is possible for us to control the musical harmony of the abvāt, by the use of metres [abhar] made up of complete taf'ila.¹

Similarly, as-Sayyāb's tendency to uncover his feelings of alienation through the medium of his love poetry can be attributed to many sources other than Tāhā. In his own country ar-Ruṣāfī (1875-1945) had felt the pangs of strangeness and said, "My soul is melancholy, and inclined to melancholy verse"², while the poets of both the Diwān and Mahjār groups had depicted the deserted lover and the sufferings and miseries of the disillusioned poet, thus also giving vent to wider and deeper feelings of alienation and frustration. In this as-Sayyāb was no different and in "Len Naftarīg" talked of separation from the beloved and its outcome:

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1. Introduction to Asāṭīr, p. 6.
2. See M.A.P., p. 57.
The prevalent romantic attitude towards Nature also cast its spell on as-Sayyāb, who had, undoubtedly, a very close relationship with it in his native Jaykūr, which nestles amongst the palm groves of Basra. For as-Sayyāb Nature was a refuge, where he could escape from the cares of urban life:

\[\text{سننني كوننا قَبَّ الفصون بِجانِب النَّبِيع... ... ... ... ...} \]

just as it had been for Tāhā and most romantic poets, while it was also important in the life of the poet and that of mankind generally because, as part of the same creation, all are inexorably linked together:

\[\text{وكانَ القَطِيعُ فِي مَفرَّةُ الْمَردِّ} \]
\[\text{وَفَلَوبُ الزَّهْرَةُ طَامِنَتْ بِالْأَلْدَرُ} \]
\[\text{إِلاِ الرَّمَالُ فِي الصُّحْرَاءِ؟} \]

3. Ibid., p. 201.
The poet and his poetry is a complex, and often contradictory, subject as far as as-Sayyāb is concerned, especially earlier in his life, where the mark of romantic attitudes towards the poet dominate all else:

But it is in his attitude towards the poet that we can find definite traces of Tāhā's influence, especially in the poem "Sirāj", which contains obvious echoes from Tāhā's description of the poet in "Ghurfat ash-Shā'ir". In the latter Tāhā describes the poet suffering at night, while the rest of mankind sleeps, lost in contemplation from which he only stirs to compose poetry, and ends by admonishing the poet to take rest for he has undergone great hardships. In as-Sayyāb's poem we find the author asking the lamp to take care of another sorrowing poet in a room lit only by the sad, yellow rays of the lamp itself, and begging it not to wake him when he finally sleeps:

\[\text{\footnotesize \text{\textsuperscript{1}} Diwān, 1, p. 14 (dated 2/47).} \]
\[\text{\footnotesize \text{\textsuperscript{2}} Diwān Tāhā, p. 38.} \]
\[\text{\footnotesize \text{\textsuperscript{3}} Diwān, 2, p. 100 (dated 2/44).} \]
There are, of course, other influences upon as-Sayyāb's attitude towards the poet but they shall be discussed in the chapter on our poet himself, and not in this section which is primarily involved with the influences of Ţāhā upon as-Sayyāb.

We have already discussed how 'Alī Maḥmūd Ţāhā drew not only upon both classical and modern Arabic sources for his inspiration, but also adapted anything which he found suitable from European literatures, and as-Sayyāb was equally eclectic in his admiration, so that, while gaining greatly from his knowledge of and respect for classical literature, he also adopted whatever attracted him from English literature. Perhaps the most obvious example of this is his ash-Shi’r al-Ḥurr, which was initially composed under the influence of English metrics, although he was also encouraged by previous attempts in Arabic literature. But as-Sayyāb was adamant that Arabic literature should retain its own identity while profiting from other literatures as much as possible:

[Poetry] is neither a film nor a newspaper article...

... so our poetry must not be a western distortion in Arabic dress... we should benefit from what is best in our own literary heritage, while also benefitting from what the west has produced -- and especially the English speaking [areas] -- in the world of verse.¹

As-Sayyāb was himself a good example of this because, while he introduced many new forms into Arabic literature, he never forgot the

¹ Rasā’il, p. 80.
wealth of his own literary culture. This is particularly clear in the Diwan Qitharat ar-Riy, where no less than five poems are dedicated to Wordsworth\(^1\), while another poem carries this footnote, "The English poet, John Keats, died of tuberculosis when he was twenty-five years old, and the last poem which he wrote talks of a star in the sky."\(^2\) Later as-Sayyāb was to fall under the influence of T. S. Eliot, Edith Sitwell, and Shakespeare and was to sprinkle his verse with several allusions to the last two especially throughout his work\(^3\), while the influence of the former is very clear from the early 1950s onwards.\(^4\)

While the preceding paragraph may seem rather out of place at this point, it was necessary to elucidate another European influence upon as-Sayyāb which differed from those mentioned above in as much as

2. The line of poetry is:

\[
\text{نَبِي} \text{كُلَّيِّ مع الْمَبْتُرِيّ الْرَّيْض} \quad \text{وَقَدْ خَاطِبَ النَّجْمَةُ السَّابِحَةُ}
\]

Diwān, 1, p. 84. As-Sayyāb is obviously referring to poem in following stanza, which is placed within inverted commas.

3. For example of Shakespeare see Diwān, 1, p. 356, "Min Ru'vā Fū Kār"; and Ibid., p. 567 and 588, al-Asliha wa-l-Atfāl. For Sitwell, see Ibid., p. 357, "Min Ru'vā Fū Kār"; and Ibid., p. 579, al-Asliha wa-l-Atfāl. It is also interesting to note that he alludes to a poem by Garcia Lorca in "Min Ru'vā Fū Kār", Ibid., p. 357; and to Eliot on p. 356, where he connects him, through a quotation to Shakespeare.

4. For a short synopsis of the western influences upon as-Sayyāb, see Boullata, footnote 4, in the article by Loya, Arieh, "As-Sayyāb and the influence of T. S. Eliot", Muslim World, (1971), vol. 61, p. 189. The article itself is weak on several points as is obvious from the footnotes.
they were primary, that is as-Sayyāb had probably read the original, while the influence of Baudelaire's poetry upon the young as-Sayyāb more probably came through his reading of Tāhā's translation of his works. As we have seen Tāhā thought highly of this individualistic writer, and, when we survey the major characteristics of Baudelaire's poetry, we can trace similar themes and tensions in the works of 'Alī Mahmūd Tāhā, Abū Shabaka and as-Sayyāb.

The overriding interests of Baudelaire were the eternal contradictions of mankind, "the problem of his aspiration towards goodness and beauty combined with his proclivity towards sin and vice. The problems of sin — and particularly its illusory attraction — never ceased to preoccupy him, and his aim was to discover its nature."¹ Furthermore, the Frenchman's interest in realistic and sensual matters also struck chords in the hearts of these Arab poets, as did his attitude towards beauty, which he worshipped, the poet, who had to have attained a degree of spirituality which rendered him capable of interpreting and understanding Existence, art, which was not only the only true translation of beauty in this world but also a representation of the Ideal, and towards the musical nature of composition, which should evoke a reaction in the reader similar to that called up by music itself, because "la poésie touche à la musique."²

For 'Alī Mahmūd Tāhā and as-Sayyāb the question of sin, goodness and beauty, and the tension and interaction between them, was of great importance. In Arwāḥ wa-Ashbāḥ³ Tāhā explored the conflict between

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2. See Ibid., p. x.
the soul and the body, mostly within the confines of man's relationship with women, and there is little, if any, doubt that as-Sayyāb's Bayn ar-Rūḥ wa-l-Jasad, which treats the same theme from the same angle, was written under the influence of the former, even as regards the use of dialogue. However, while Tāhā's poem contains a veritable mêlée of Greek characters, as-Sayyāb's work is a more simple debate between "Shā'ir ar-Rūḥ" and "Shā'ir ash-Shahwa" concerning a girl called Alice, and, towards the conclusion, the true nature of sin and its place in man's personality. While the spiritual poet is very much involved with idyllic and platonic love, the sensual one has no doubts concerning the sinful flaws of both men and women. The former is ardently in love with the girl but seeks to control his passion, thus preventing any stain from falling upon both his love and its object:

ما زال صانعَ طرفها يتصلى
نظر يعنَ عن آنانها ويعدل

whereas the latter cannot, or will not, control his passions:

تلك الدماء بتبني المتفرَّم
نارَ، فلا ينه كُل مَحَرَّم
وارتفَّت جسمه بالأسْفَم

From this, and the tone of the qasīda generally, it is quite clear that the poem is in fact a debate between two contradictory aspects

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2. Ibid., p. 338 and p. 339-41, resp.
of the poet's own personality, and between his physical needs and desires and his hopes for a relationship which combines the sensual side of love with that which is spiritual and pure; a desire which is summed up in two lines:

But the poem also deals with the nature of sin itself. Is it an inherent tendency inherited by mankind at birth, or is it something brought into being as a result of mundane experiences? According to the spiritual poet the body and soul are one, so any tarnishing of the body must stain the soul:

But, according to the other poet, this is not so:

because the soul, contrary to the belief of the spiritual poet, is born neither pure nor base, but possessed of both potentialities, being thus free to choose one way or the other:

It is, perhaps, the last lines of the collected fragments that remain of this *gasīda* which bring the argument to some sort of conclusion, when it is pointed out that no man is suitable to love and to woo the gentle sex if he is incapable of also perceiving their sensuality, as this will only end in disillusionment and frustration:

Thus the poet announces that the romantic ideal of platonic love is not only unrealistic, but even unnatural, and that sensual love, in the right context and under the correct circumstances, is more relevant to life, and more fulfilling. This ideals is also repeated many times in the works of Tāhā, a point which probably encouraged as-Sayyāb to compose this poem, and to send it to the former, seeking his approval.

However, Tāhā, while relishing the joys of the flesh in a way which is unconcerned with sin and the results thereof, was also capable of delicate understanding of woman’s lot and her character, as we have seen in "al-*Mūsīqīyya al-‘Amyā‘", and of recognising the spiritual and inspirational side of her personality, as in "Imra‘ā":

As-Sayyāb was also interested in the spiritual and psychological aspects of her nature, although his attitude towards women as a whole differed fundamentally from that of Tāhā, because as-Sayyāb was usually more bitter in his subjective poems on women, and more inclined to censure and blame. It is also true that as-Sayyāb's women fell into stricter categories and tended to be more stereotyped than those of Tāhā, shaped as they were by his frustrating and unhappy experience of love, and especially that for Wafīqa, his cousin, whose death came as a cruel blow to as-Sayyāb, and which led one critic to claim,

Indeed the development of the feminine personalities [in his verse] uncover the nature of as-Sayyāb's feelings towards women, and reveal his resentment towards them and his slow withdrawal from them, so that he even reclaimed the things that he had already given them ... and when this stage was reached we know that his beloved Wafīqa, of the window, had died.2

But there are several similarities in their verse concerning women in spite of this basic difference. In two poems, "Diwān Shiʿr"1

1. Diwān T., p. 653.
2. al-Hagrī, p. 79.
and "'Awdat ad-Dīwān", as-Sayyāb bestows a human existence on the diwān of verse which he has lent to fair women, rather as Tāhā had endowed the moon with sensual desires in the poem "al-Qamar al-‘Ashiq", and tells his returned diwān how he envies it its sojourn amongst the beautiful virgins:

Similarly, like Tāhā, as-Sayyāb often portrays his woman as a femme fatale, who seeks to lead the poet astray and to ruin him through his own passions:

although she can also be a source of inspiration, as in the poem "al-Warda al-Manthūra", in which he begs his beloved to spread flowers all over his grave, so that he can continue to sing, or even, with such encouragement, sing more beautifully:

1. Dīwān, 2, p. 176-7 (‘Awdat ad-Dīwān).
2. Ibid., p. 322-3.
while, she can also, according to another poem, assuage his pain:

It is also interesting to note that as-Sayyāb chose to write a poem about a blind prostitute called al-Mūmis al-‘Amyā', which cannot help but remind the reader of Tāhā's poem "al-Mūsiciyya al-‘Amyā'"°, both by the title and by as-Sayyāb's approach towards his subject. However, the prostitute of the former is no longer young, while it is the very youth and beauty of Tāhā's musician that first attracts him to her, and initiates his contemplation of her situation. The reason for this difference probably stems from the differing intentions of the two poets concerned. As-Sayyāb intended that his qasīda should carry a social comment on the situation of women in society, and to this end draws a somewhat light narrative around his character, showing how society has damned her for being unprotected and raped, when the former arose from its bad treatment of the poorer elements in society, while the latter arose from the tendency of certain men

2. Ibid., p. 302.
to see women as unfeeling and irrelevant objects of sexual enjoyment. Thus, while both poets felt compassion towards their blind characters, they express it differently. As-Sayyāb's sympathy is mixed with bitterness towards society and with forceful pity, while Tāhā is more concerned with the musician's private life, and how her blindness has deprived her of the normal hopes of young Arab women. In this way as-Sayyāb is more interested in conveying to his reader the unjustness of the prostitute's status and her suffering, than with her physical appearance, which is only used to emphasise her grievous state:

whereas, as we have already seen, Tāhā made his musician's beauty and talent the fulcrum for his poem.

Another interesting point about these two poems is that the opening section of both clearly show the skill of their respective authors as regards the creation of atmosphere, and their ability to sustain it

1. Diwān, 1, p. 520-1.
once confirmed, by the use of emotive vocabulary and talented imagery. Yet, as might have been expected, considering the contents of each 
qasīda, the scenes painted by the poets are quite distinct from each other, both in intention and treatment. Ṭāhā wanted to encourage his reader into a mood of tranquil melancholy, so as to introduce his personal feelings towards the musician,

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2. Diwān, 1, p. 509-10.
It is obvious that both poets sought to draw their reader into an imaginative microcosm by the use of associative diction and atmosphere, rather than by simply describing the scene in pictorial terms, and this is, perhaps, one of the reasons for the various prefices which they felt were necessary to ensure their audience's understanding and sympathy. However, both Tāhā and as-Sayyāb were perfectly capable of manipulating their raw poetic materials according to their requirements, and were particularly interested in the effect of the sounds of the words they used, and in their emotional impact upon the reader, as can be seen in the two previous quotes. In the opening lines of Tāhā's poem the silvery white light of the stars and the lightning are the natural background for the sublime spiritual beauty of the musician in the eyes of Tāhā, while the golden light of the dawn reminds us of her warm sensual attractions, which are none¬theless natural and curiously innocent like the purity of the nargīs itself. The vocabulary employed in this section is classical, although the expression is at one time modern and timeless, and thus Tāhā intended to kindle the reader's imagination and sympathy by using diction which had been used to express certain ideas for centuries, and which called up a predictable reaction.

The case of al-Mūmīs al-‘Amyā is quite different. Here as-Sayyāb deliberately builds up images of darkness, so that the final lines of the quote, with its allusions to Medusa, Babel, wolves and crows, render the scene even more malignant and oppressive. In doing so as-Sayyāb does not take refuge in classical diction, but employs a personal style of superimposed imagery which strikes at the heart of the reader by measured and subjective association, rather than stylised reactions. However, it should also be remembered that Tāhā is also
capable of this, and in "Hazāmat ash-Shayṭān" creates atmosphere by depicting the darkness surrounding the dangerous circumstances of the protagonists:

النار لا تدري جوانبه
ولا ذات الظلم الحروف بانتِها
و'*الليل* نَعمتُ دوام تلميذٌ فلم تَمْاءُ؟

For as-Sayyāb and Tāhā poetry should always have a musical quality about it, and effect the audience similarly, and the classical background of both helped them to mould metre and rhythm to suit their purpose, and enhance the atmosphere of any poem. In his qasīda "Hulm Layla", Tāhā shows his talent for lyric verse:

فَتُرْبْيَةٌ في الاحترار
سواء ليالي الغرام والشَّغْر
إِنِّي رَأيتَ الذِّيْنَ فِي الأَئْر
تَنْقِلُ كَنَاَءَ طَائِرَ الفَجْر
فَيْنَِّيَلَّا الَّذِينَ وَالسَّبْيَ جَريَّ

as does as-Sayyāb in the poem "‘Alī sh-Shāṭṭī", the structure of which is obviously lyrical:

على الشَّاهِي، إسلام
وفي ملكة آياتي
غداً رقم الهوى ينبو
عَرَآء١ قَبِيَّ الدَّماي

1. Dīwān, p. 663.
2. Ibid., p. 259.
This lyricism is often consolidated by their brilliant, and often touching personification of inanimate objects, making them sympathetic to the feelings and attitudes of the poet himself. A striking example of this is Ṭāhā's "al-Qamar al-ʿAshiq"², while as-Sayyāb's poem "Ya Layl" pivots upon the personification of night, which is then made to participate in the poet's emotional experience:

Personification is, as we have already discovered, often in poems set in the form of a dialogue in the verse of Ṭāhā and as-Sayyāb, and dialectic verse obviously attracted both poets as their respective

2. Diwān T., p. 231.
dlwāns include many examples of this, many of which have a certain tension about them. A simple example of this can be found in Tāhā’s "Su‘āl wa-Jawāb", or in "al-Warda as-Safrā’"\(^1\), and in as-Sayyāb’s "Alā r-Rābiwa"\(^2\), or in "Thawrat al-Ahilla":

From the preceding discussion it is quite clear that as-Sayyāb and Tāhā had much in common as regards attitudes and poetic styles, and it is extremely difficult to separate what arises from a mutual source or similar psychological and emotional tendencies, and what grows from direct imitation on the part of as-Sayyāb. There can be no doubt that as-Sayyāb’s interest in the affairs of the flesh were by no means a mere reflection of Tāhā’s delight therein, especially when one considers how both became obsessed in sensual pleasures in their verse as they became physically weaker. Yet there is evidence that as-Sayyāb sought to reproduce Tāhā’s somewhat European treatment of Bacchanalian pleasures in his earlier poems, and especially in "Hawān Wāhid" and "Andāb wa-Ahlām", where he adopted the rather unusual stance for him of a reveller in wine, women, and song:

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1. Diwān Tāhā, p. 567 and 738 resp..  
2. Diwān, 2, p. 98.  
3. Ibid., p. 292-5.
It is also probable that Tāhā's genius for personification inspired as-Sayyāb to greater endeavour, as did his precise diction and metrical control, and his ability to create atmosphere, both from pictorial images and from his emotive use of words, especially those concerned with night and day, sadness and happiness, and evil and good. Indeed, it is probably true to say that nearly all Tāhā's poetry drew the praise of the young as-Sayyāb, as it did from most of his generation, and exerted a great influence upon him up until the late 1940s, when as-Sayyāb fell increasingly under the influence of English poetry.

1. Diwān, 1, p. 49-51 (dated 2/48); and p. 5-11 (dated 12/46) resp.
However as-Sayyāb's poetry was always individualistic in spite of external influences, and, although he was later to claim that he disliked subjective verse\(^1\), used his own emotions and experiences as the themes for his verse, so that even the earliest poems most obviously influenced by Tāhā, or some other poet, bear the clear stamp of as-Sayyāb's embryonic style. In this way his verse tends to be full of frustration, delusion and resentment, except when discussing his beloved Rif and Nature generally, while that of Tāhā is more tranquil, and imbued with melancholy remembrances of pleasure and more truly romantic strangeness, with only the slightest trace of censure or blame. But, as has become clear in the course of this research, as-Sayyāb was undoubtedly correct when he claimed that Tāhā had been a profound influence upon him, and such an influence, and conscious or subconscious imitation, is a necessary phase in the development of any poet, and there can be no doubt that as-Sayyāb's poetic style gained much from such exercises, as he developed towards a fuller, and more fulfilling mode of poetic expression.

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Abū Shabaka

Perhaps the most truly Arab romantic poet, in the strictest European sense of the word, was Ilyās Abū Shabaka (1903-1947).

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\(^1\) For a discussion of his attitude to subjective poetry see *Abta*, p. 83-4; where as-Sayyāb describes it as "pro-colonial"; later he changed his mind, and announced that he was only writing subjective verse by that time; *Rasā'īl*, p. 164. Even his more "committed" poems reflect his own ideals and thoughts, and not those of any political party or section of society.
Although Abū Shabaka’s poetry appears to have a lot in common with that of his contemporary ‘Alī Maḥmūd Ṭāhā, the basic outlook of the two poets differed greatly, in spite of their similar intellectual background. Like Ṭāhā Abū Shabaka was well-versed in European literature, to which he had access through the medium of French, and was obviously influenced by its literary theories and verse, writing many articles which discussed various themes drawn from western sources.¹ Indeed, in his second volume al-Marīd as-Sāmit we find many echoes from the works of the French romantics, as well as from their ever-present pessimism, so that the trend instituted in al-Ǧithāra, his first volume published in 1926, which contained verse translations of some of the poems of Lamartine and Musset amongst others, is continued. His passion for Baudelaire also assisted in the improvement of his style, giving depth to his impassioned poetry concerning the nature of evil and good, and sin and innocence, while de Vigny’s poem "Le Colère de Samson" seems to have inspired Abū Shabaka’s own poem "Shamshūn", although the latter is by no means a simple copy of the former, and possesses a strong character of its own.

Apart from his articles on French literary criticism and French literature generally, Abū Shabaka wrote several short stories, but these tended to be too moralistic and religiously orientated for the average palate and enjoyed little success, especially when compared to the genius of his poetic compositions.² Indeed Christianity exerted a

¹. For details see M.A.P., p. 146. For general discussion of cultural background see Churayb, Ilyās Abū Shabaka: Dirāsāt wa-Dhikrayāt (Beirut, n.d.), p. 253–289.
². See M.A.P., p. 146.
great influence over the life of Abū Shabaka, and the Bible, especially 
the Old Testament, proved itself an unending source of inspiration 
for him, as will become clearer in the chapter on symbolism. However, 
this inspiration was somewhat indirect as it appears to have grown 
originally from his reading of Milton’s Paradise Lost, Goethe’s Faust, 
and the works of Hugo, de Vigny, Lamartine and their associates¹; 
although there can be little doubt that the final outcome was due to 
his own endeavour and treatment of the subjects.

Abū Shabaka was also influenced by his own Arabic culture and we 
can find the faint shadows of Abū Nuwās and al-Ma‘arri in his earlier 
works, while the influence of the poets of the Ḥadżar, and especially 
Jibrān, is clear in his tendency towards lyrical and metrical 
experimentation, wherein he sought to find metres and rhythms which 
were in harmony with his intentions and his subject, while also seeking 
to employ simple and precise diction which would not grate against the 
quiet melodies of his verse.²

Thus, like Tāhā, Abū Shabaka made use of all the literary criticism 
and poetry available to him, devouring it eagerly so that he could 
harness whatever he found suitable in his own compositions, while 
developing his own theories about art and the artist. In his intro-
duction to Afā‘ī l-Firdaws, he discusses the theories of Paul Valéry 
and Abbé Bremond, refuting the former while agreeing with the latter 
in most cases.³

¹ For discussion see Razzūq, Razzūq Faraj, Ilyās Abū Shabaka 
wa-Shi‘ruh (Beirut, 1956), p. 64-66.
² For short statement about Jibrān, see Razzūq, p. 108.
³ See Afā‘ī l-Firdaws (Beirut, 1948), Introduction.
For Abū Shabaka the traditional idea of the poet as an artistic craftsman was no longer valid, and thus he strongly disagreed with Valéry's claim that poetry was a matter of conscious, rather than inspired composition. While he was willing to admit that artistry was a necessary part of poetic composition, he also insisted that it should be combined with the soul (an-nafs) and organic unity, otherwise the poetry would be incomplete and deficient in expression or coherent thought patterns. It was, according to Abū Shabaka, the pedantic attitude of the Arabs towards poetry, seeing it primarily as an intellectual pursuit, that had led to rampant obscurity and lack of clear expression, so the modern poet should seek to free himself from these bonds and write verse which is coherent with the requirements of his expression and literary style, and refuse to reproduce mere imitations of earlier models, even if this forces him to attack and destroy the existing norms. While the poet should be aware of the unity and admirable heritage of Arabic literature, he should never allow himself to totally accept the theories and dictates of any particular group or critical creed, because

poetry is a living organism which enfolds Nature and life, and can be neither measured or balanced [with any other entity], for theories belong to schools and [predetermined] intentions, and only

1. See Razzūq, p. 105.
3. Ibid., p. 106.
4. Ibid., p. 106.
5. Ibid., p. 107.
exist on the sidelines of art . . . as the short-lived dictator lives on the sidelines of his [eternal] community.¹

Thus the poet should remain independent of the theories of others, because "poetic schools are prisons and their theories are shackles, and the poet cannot live in this servile environment, for Nature is his spacious environment, adapting to his emotions according to their ever-changing manifestations."²

From this it is clear that the poet should, in Abū Shabaka's opinion, express his own deep feelings or emotions according to personal experiences, and not according to those of others, because the poet who "melts the innermost secrets of his heart is more beautiful than the poet who [merely] sheds tears from his eyes."³ Furthermore, the power that influences the poet is in fact his own soul, "and the soul is something whose true nature is not known"⁴, combined with his unquenchable thirst to understand the Truth of Existence and to perceive the Unknown (al-Majhūl)⁵, so that his whole being, emotions, senses and intellect, are involved in his quest, so that he can choose neither the time nor the place for his composition, because the poetic impulse is always within him, awaiting the necessary catalyst. Thus the poet lives his poetry and sees the whole of Existence as a source of inspiration, and employs "the assistance of his tastes, intellect

2. Ibid., p. 19-20.
4. Ibid., p. 100.
and feelings so as to balance [its parts] accurately.\(^1\) But, he has
to wait for this inspiration, and cannot even choose his own diction
when composing under its sway, because "the true poet has no control
over his choice of words", for, indeed, "poetry descends fully clothed.
And these clothes are an integral part of its sensibility and cannot
be divided."\(^2\)

The idea of an inspired poet is, of course, typical of the romantic
attitude towards poetry and the poet, as is his stance as a prophet who
receives his message from above, without conscious thought of invention.
Like the poet-prophet of Shukrî, Nâjî or 'Alî Maḥmûd Ṭâhâ, Abû Shabaka's
poet is unheeded by his people, and is seen suffering alone, having
turned away from mankind to seek communion with Nature. In his extended
narrative poem \(\text{Ghalwâ'}\), he says that the poet is given his talent by
God:

\[
\text{"Dunṣari l'dā'ah al-mawrāh}
\]
\[
\text{"Warrāṉ in al-jāṟ ḵul al-mānaḵ}
\]
\[
\text{"Warrāṉ in al-maj̱nūn al-sa'ṉ}
\]
\[
\text{"Munā'a al-lā'ahat al-shu'rā'}\]

so that he can pour all his heart into his verse:

\[
\text{"Sūrā' al-fā'i al-sha'ārī fi khuwā'ī}
\]
\[
\text{"Biğ̱i fiğ̱rī al-qalb} fi ḍ̱ā'iṟā'
\]
\[
\text{"Shu'râ' biğ̱i l'mzn} fi mṣ'ahaẖ
\]

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1. See Razzūq, p. 105.
2. \(\text{Afa'ī 1-Firdaws}, \text{Introduction}, \text{p. 11}.\)
3. \(\text{Ghalwā'} (\text{Beirut}, 1945), \text{p. 71} \)
While in "al-Inā" he tells how he has offered the wine of his heart to man, but they have failed to understand and accept his gift, so he tastes it himself and finds that, in spite of the suffering he has undergone at the hands of his fellow men, he has still love left over:

فَشَاهدتْ قِلبيَّ في اناي ضَامِنًا
وَأَناي الْلَّبَّ مِلًا إِنايَّ.

Again, in "al-Gādhūra", he wishes someone would hear and hearken to him:

لَذاذْ أَحَدِي وَلاَ كَانِي إِنَّمَا تَبَأَّدَتْ
وَهَلَّ فِي الْوَرِي إِذْنَ إِنَّ قَتَّ الْأَشَدَّ

so that this continual frustration leads him to exclaim in another poem, "Ruqād al-Qalam":

أَيَا قَلْبِي مَا مَأَثِرَ لَوْ كَتَبَ سَكَّةً
وَتَتَنُّهَرُ اسْمِي السُّهُولِ مَا أَخَرَّی

and to call his pen to silence and eternal inertia:

أَيَا قَلْبِي فِي الْغُمْ دَلْتُ نَّفْصًا
رَيا فَخْرَ الْغُمْ لَا تَتَنُّهَرُ اسْمِيِ الدَّمَـٰرِ

1. Badawi, Anthology, p. 94.
From what precedes it is clear that Abū Shabaka's poet finds the world a cold and lonely place, and, unsurprisingly, turns from the society of man to that of Nature, which sympathises with him and his predicament. Indeed, according to Abū Shabaka, the poet is one of the people to whom true understanding of Nature is granted, as his senses are sharpened so that he can perceive and appreciate its manifest and hidden beauties:

For Nature has many lovely secrets which the senses, however sharp, cannot comprehend. Rather they are felt through the soul which has been strengthened, and even this soul, however strong, cannot conquer Nature so as to take advantage of her lovely secrets, unless it has gained [complete] experience of this world, and this is impossible. If the soul had gained this experience it would reach a complete and luminous affinity and equality with Nature, and reach the level of God, for the pure soul is, in fact, God.¹

Nature is, therefore, sublime and it is this sublimity that enables it to effect the poet, whose soul undergoes "moments in which it is pure, so that the hidden beauty of Nature is reflected upon it, and this beauty suddenly reveals secrets to the soul, which render the cultured poets tongue eloquent with lofty meanings."² Thus, while

². Ibid., Introduction, p. 15.
Nature is the overpowering force in the life of mankind, it is indispensable for the poet, inspiring him to verse, while also furnishing him with its subject matter, "because Nature is the lute of the poet, and it is futile for the poet to search for his melodies in anything other than this lute."  

In this way Nature becomes both the musician and the music, with the poet as an intermediary somewhere between pure Nature, which is God, and mankind, which is part of God's creation and thus intimately involved with Nature. We find this attitude mirrored in the diwāns of Abū Shabaka, in which Nature is always very much in evidence, usually partaking in the feelings and the experiences of the poet himself, or consolidating the atmosphere of a particular asīda. This is the case in Ghalwā', in which Nature is seen as the backcloth to the action of the poem, irrespective of the tone of each particular section, being benign or malignant according to the dictates of the narrative. Thus we find night backing up Ghalwā' s feelings of sin and eternal alienation, while the branches of the trees sigh as it is they who had sinned:

2. Ibid., p. 17.  
However, it is the volume al-Alhān that Nature takes its rightful place, as practically the whole diwān is devoted to Nature and pastoral verse. In the poem "Alhān as-Sayr" we find the whole of Nature taking part in a single experience:

والمراعي في النهار أي بحر أُهمَنَر
وأذا ما أقبل الليل الظري
فعلي النفق من الزهر شبار
والضي يمشي الهوينا
في الري والصبا
تحمل العطر البنيا
من خروق الزهر وعصر النثر.

Obviously this view of Nature and rural life generally has fallen into the fallacy of idealised purity and simplicity, which is particularly reminiscent of the Mahjar poems, and similarly Abū Shabaka juxtaposes the simple innocence of the shepherds and peasants of the countryside to the evils of the city and its inhabitants:

زَارِعُ المَحْتَوِلِ فِي الْبُكْرَ
فِي لَحْيِ الزَّهْرِ
ابْنَ النَّامِسَ سَيِّدٌ
مِن ذَرَاعِيِّهِ الْفَتِيرِ

1. al-Alhān (Beirut, 1941), p. 21.
2. Ibid., p. 36-7.
It is their close proximity to Nature that purifies the hearts and minds of these simple people:

Yet the poet was also aware of the unsalubrious side of Nature, although this is more often concerned with his portrayal of the actions and emotions of mankind, than with his descriptive or lyrical verse. This is particularly true in Ghalwā', where Ghalwā’ is described in terms of all that is soft and gentle, while her lascivious cousin, Warda, is portrayed by the dark and cruel aspects of Nature. Thus Ghalwā’ is introduced as:

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while Warda, in spite of her beauty and that of her name itself, is destructive:

وجملها يعمل للجنون
في كل عرق بداء، رجل
عين زهور ترى
ساقية تنور على الزهور
مختلف الشروط في الطبيعة
كيف ارادة وردة جهنم.

Again, in Afa'ī Firdaws, Abū Shabaka uses Nature, and especially animal imagery, to describe the depravity of mankind, as in "al-Qadhūra", in which he sees man as squirming, like drunken worms, in their own corruption:

فأبمرت الهباتا تعمدها يو،
إذا علقت فيها النور، جرد
تلمع بها الدودان السكري تغريد
ورشآدت في الاطلاق، مقدراً.

However animal imagery is used more often, in this particular volume, to depict the sensuality and amorality of the sensuous temptress, as had been the case in Ghalwā'. Perhaps the best example of this is

3. Although Ghalwā' was published in 1945, and Afa'ī Firdaws in 1938, the former was actually written between 1926 and 1932.
"Shamshūn", the first poem in the volume, in which the females of all species are shown as a source of anguish for the male, writhing because of his sexual frustrations:

Furthermore, Delilah is also depicted as an animal, preying on Samson, when appearing to wish only his pleasure:

In the above examples we have an inescapable indication of his attitude towards women during the composition of Afāʿī 1-Firdaws, which is lightened only once, where he mentions Ghalwā', saying:

1. Afāʿī 1-Firdaws, p. 21-22.
2. Ibid., p. 22-3.
Here she is contrasted with a woman who is married and has a child, but who is also his mistress:

Its attitude towards women was probably influenced by his personal life at the time, which we know to have been particularly unhappy and frustrating 3, but whatever the cause we can hardly doubt the high standard and the forcefulness of the poetry written during these years. In the earlier part of his adult life Abū Shabaka's poetry is fraught with tension between sin and innocence and the inner conflict between his feelings of sin and his sensual desires, and his knowledge of divine forgiveness and his inability to refrain from further sins. This conflict is fundamentally different to that found in either Baudelaire or Tāhā, who exhibited practically no personal feelings of sin and regret, while Abū Shabaka continually denounces his sinfulness, and, in spite of the deep innocence which remains in his heart, cannot overcome his desire for gratification.

1. Afāʾī l-Firdaws, p. 33.
2. Ibid., p. 33.
3. For details see Razzaq, p. 180 ff.
In "al-Qadhura" woman is seen as an evil temptress calling man to sin, and feeding her children debauchery with the milk from her breast:

yet, despite his sin and relationships with such women, he is aware of a certain innocence, and can announce:

However, still torn with desire, he begs night to leave him in darkness and heedlessness, as in "ash-Shahwa al-Ḥamrā":

while yearning for forgiveness and final redemption:

__________________________
1. Afāf l-Firdaws, p. 27.
2. Ibid., p. 38.
3. Ibid., p. 41.
4. Ibid., p. 50.
knowing, as he states in "Sodom", that his own body is his Hell:

However, in the diwan Nidā' al-Calb we find a quite different attitude towards women. His feelings are no longer simple lust and sensual desires, but a purer sort of love which brings woman closer to the divine than the infernal. Now she has become a bringer of joy and tranquility:

and, indeed, love has become so spiritual that the two lovers have become indistinguishable from each other:

so that the poet enters into a union with his beloved which is mystical and undefiled by mere sensual matters:

1. Afīf 1-Firdaws, p. 37.
3. Ibid., p. 54.
4. Ibid., p. 43.
Furthermore, in this volume even suffering has become acceptable, because it has borne fruit as regards his verse, as he tells us in the poem "al-‘Adhāb al-Hayy":

في جرومي هذا النجم
وكل ما يبكي من الغزاب يذوب هما على كتابي
ينضب نور من سنور
على مرايدي
يحب عوني عوني نوادي

This tone is further confirmed in the last volume published during his lifetime, Ilā 1-Abad (1944), where all is harmony and beauty, so that the wonder and joy of the Universe is fully recognised and enjoyed, for the poet has finally found a fulfilling and eternal love:

قل لي لي ياطير قال حبيبي
وعي بين من الحداد زهر
وفي تواليت خيلة خيلة
قل ليي رأيته في نراقين

He has not, however, forgotten his suffering, rather he has ridden the storm and attained a higher stage of understanding thereby:

لا أبخل لد أرهب نعما ت렴ب
ولا أبخل جدو
ناصبها اللى في اللى أرى
قد كنت اعزوا فيلك صنسنا أثلاه

2. Ilā 1-Abad (Beirut, 1945), p. 16.
This becomes a recurrent theme in Abū Shabaka's works, having been important from the very beginning. In Ghalwā' it constituted the very moral of the diwan, as Ghalwā', the young innocent girl, having found her cousin engaged in sexual intercourse in the bed next to hers, is driven mad by the belief that it is in fact she, and not Warda, who has committed fornication. While this story is somewhat melodramatic at first glance, its significance runs deep, and into the realms of the psychological. The fact that Ghalwā' believes herself capable of such a sin would seem to indicate that Ghalwā' is in fact looking for the sensual side of her own character to complete her personality, while Shafīq's inability to recognise his love for Ghalwā' until she has, in a sense, lost her innocence, shows how he wants his women to have knowledge of sensual matters while retaining a sense of innocence. This is, of course, typical of the romantic tendency towards women who suffer, but are nevertheless innocent, like Keat's "La Belle Dame Sans Merci", but Abū Shabaka's treatment of the theme makes the poem rewarding, although somewhat prone to exaggeration. The dreamlike state of the poem is backed up by several dreams and visions within the narrative itself, such as Shafīq's vision of Ghalwā' as a corpse shortly after hearing of her illness, which unveils his love for her, of which he was previously ignorant. Throughout the winter Ghalwā' suffers from the agonies of guilt but,

1. Ilā l-Abad, p. 37-38.
2. Ghalwā', p. 34 ff.
with the spring, she begins to recover her health, although still convinced of her guilt:

Không thể lão hóa được

until she finally takes refuge in a church, where she is found by Shaffiq, and her continued certainty of her guilt is interpreted in her own words:

فانت ترقص في الربيع الجميل
وتصمر في الزهر لون اليابة

But Shaffiq disputes this idea, and it is only when she gives in to her love for Shaffiq and rediscovers her innocence, that the dreams of the poem return to purity and tranquility:

تلاشت رؤى نفسها الدلية
وذاوي على الترقب الحالية
للتعمّم احلاها السافية
وأمّ صعى البدور خلف البيال
وهوّست الطير بين النصرين

The moral of the poem is thus that we can only be cleansed and attain Heaven through pain:

في طريق للعجات والتنقي
فنيب ميرات من تألحا

1. Chalwa*, p. 46.
2. Ibid., p. 88.
3. Ibid., p. 90-91.
as Shaffiq had previously heard uttered by an ethereal voice:

However, in the diwāns Nīdā’ al-Qalb and Ilā l-Abad the theme of salvation through suffering is more often reiterated, and we feel that the poet has achieved a state of acceptance and final contentment, although the shadows of his pain and suffering remain, and distant echoes of the combat between sin and evil, and innocence and good, which pervaded Afā‘ī l-Firdaws. But Abū Shabaka’s talent for striking imagery is maintained throughout, and is always assisted by his strong powers of personification, as in "Ragād al-Qalam", where his pen is granted the ability to sleep and wake, and is addressed as a conscious and intelligent being:

2. Ibid., p. 69.
His talent for oblique statement and allusion, rather than direct description and narrative, also gives his verse a memorable quality. This is particularly true of his Biblical imagery and allusions, where he seldom explains in detail, taking it for granted that his reader is already aware of the significance of his allusion, as in Ghalwā', when Shaffūq discusses how salvation is attained through suffering, using symbolism concerning the Last Supper and the communion service:

\begin{center}

اود ان امرشي عيني لله

اود ان يأكل

\end{center}

or as in "Hadīth fi l-Kūkh", in which the Biblical idea of the sins of the fathers being visited on the children is hinted at:

\begin{center}

عليه عزلة من أبيه

والليل يرمى الصبي الى الربيع

\end{center}

We have seen how truly romantic Abū Shabaka's attitude towards poetry and the poet was, and how, like the European romantics, he imbued his verse with philosophical mediations, and, similarly, his attitude towards metrics was ever seeking to force back the barriers of acceptability, so that new metres and forms could be invented and freely employed. While he himself used the classical monorhyme and monometre, he preferred to choose his metre to suit his subject and tone. In Ghalwā', for example, he made use of various European stanzaic

forms, moulding both his metre and diction to cohere with his mood and intention, while he also seems to have composed the lyrical poems of al-Alhān to reflect the simple stanzic rhymes and rhythms of the folk songs of his native Lebanon.

A good example of this is perhaps "ʻUrus ʻī l-Qarya"\(^1\), which is given the form of a wedding chant, intended to be sung in a procession, opened by one guest, to whom the whole procession responds, joining their voices to his. The same can be said of Afa‘ī l-Firdaws, and particularly the poem "as-Salāt al-Hāmrā\(^2\)", which reads like a sacramental prayer for the remission of sins.

From this study it is clear that the poetic career of Abū Shabaka was quite different to that of ʻAlī Mahmūd Tāhā, although both were obsessed with the pleasures of the flesh, influenced by European literature, and passionately interested in metrical experiment. While Tāhā became increasingly interested in the pleasures of the flesh, as these had been for him an end in themselves, Abū Shabaka suffered from them and his immediate need for them, while yearning for his lost innocence, which would make him worthy of his beloved Ghalwā\(^*.\) When this longing was finally assuaged and a safe port reached, his interest in lustful matters decreased, and he became increasingly aware of the spiritual and emotional aspects of love, and wrote poetry imbued with a sense of healed wounds, whose scars, although a continual reminder of the suffering, are seen as a means to the present happiness and peace, found in the mutual love between his beloved and himself. Undoubtedly

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1. al-Alhān, p. 48-49.
2. Afa‘ī l-Firdaws, p. 50-55. See also al-Alhān, "Alhān as-Sayf", p. 20-21, which opens with an invocation to God, similar to a prayer.
it is the strife of Ghalwā' and Afā'īl-Firdaws, and the almost mystical tranquil verse of Nidā' al-Qalb and Ilā l-Abad, which makes Abū Shabaka such a rewarding poet for any student of literature, who cares to trace his poetic development throughout his comparatively short, yet successful, literary career.

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Abū Shabaka and Badr Shākir as-Sayyāb

While there are undoubtedly similarities between the verse and attitudes of Abū Shabaka and as-Sayyāb, these should not be overstated because they tend to be in areas where as-Sayyāb had fallen under the influence of 'Alī Mahmūd Tāhā. The most obvious of these is the interest of both poets in the affairs of the flesh and the tensions between sin and innocence. However, as we have seen, as-Sayyāb's treatment of this theme was very similar to that of Tāhā, and is practically free from any feelings of sin, whereas Abū Shabaka was hounded by an inner conflict between his spirit and his intellect, and his sensual desires. Yet there is one similarity, and this is namely the women found in his verse. Apart from Ghalwā', Abū Shabaka tended to see women as unprincipled temptresses, interested only in their own gratification, from whom he expected little fidelity, and as-Sayyāb's women are seldom trusted by the poet, with the possible exception of Wafiqy and he is usually found denouncing them for their treachery, as we have already seen:

فَمَا جَاءَكُمُ الْاوَّلُ الْقَرْنِ الْأَوَّلُ
لَا بُلْكَ أَكَادُ إِلَّا أَكَادُ أَنْتُمُ

دَنَّسَ بَنُو الْوَلَدِ الْمُلْتَنُمِ
The attitude of the two poets towards the poet and his poetry were also similar, although as-Sayyāb's theories changed as he became more and more involved with the social and political significance of the poet and his verse, so that the idea of the sorrowing poet taking refuge from a heedless community became one of a poet determined to compose verse encouraging mankind to greater endeavour, and to remain within society to do so:

It is also probable that as-Sayyāb was influenced by Abū Shabaka's metrical experiments, as he had no doubt read parts of Abū Shabaka's dīwān, and these readings must at least have mingled, in his mind, with the experiments carried out by the other great romantic poets of the early part of the twentieth century. But there are no signs of any direct debt in this sphere, as there is little evidence of any immediate influence as regards the ability of both poets to create atmosphere, through the manipulation of diction and metrics. Perhaps the reason for these similarities can be found in the deep love of

1. Dīwān, 2, p. 323.
Nature manifested by both poets in their verse. Both as-Sayyāb and Abū Shabaka used Nature to confirm their own feelings and the mood of their verse, and it seems very likely that this led both of them to create atmosphere through their descriptions of Nature, lending it a psychological and emotional life, which is in fact that of the protagonist of the verse:

Yet there are two noticeable similarities in the verse of these two poets which should not be ignored, one of which might well have arisen from direct influence upon as-Sayyāb on the part of Abū Shabaka, while the other probably grew from similar experiences. The latter comparison is the attitude of both poets towards suffering. Although there is little indication of as-Sayyāb believing in the efficacy of suffering earlier in his life, he was, without doubt, converted to it with the passing of time. By the time he was writing the poems later to form the diwān Unshūdat al-Matar, we find as-Sayyāb describing how not only the individual, but the whole nation achieves final success and salvation through conflict and suffering, as in "al-Masīḥ Baʿd as-Ṣalḥ", in which he states how a new and better existence is created through the suffering of Christ, when, after all the pain and persecution, Christ announces:

In this quote we see how as-Sayyāb used Biblical imagery to make a point in his poetry and this was probably partly due to Abū Shabaka's influence, although this was only one factor among many as we shall see in the chapter on symbolism. We have also seen how Abū Shabaka used Biblical allusions and oblique statements to present a particular theme, rather than a direct comment. In the same way as-Sayyāb used stories from both the Old and the New Testament, to elucidate contemporary situations and circumstances. While Abū Shabaka likens Ghalwā* to Mary Magdalene in his diwān, Ghalwā*:

قَالَ: اقْفِ يَامُ بِنَ هَجَمْتِكَ، فَسِيَّدُ الْأَلَّامِ يَبِيعَكَ
احْبِي هَيْسَينَ الْزَادِيَاءِ»

as-Sayyāb uses the story of Jesus turning the water into wine in the poem "al-'Awdat li-Jaykur":

هَذَا مَصَادِ السَّنِينَ:
الْمَاءَ خَمْرَ وَالخَوََابِ غَذاً
هَذَا رَبِيعُ الْوَيَاءِ.

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1. Diwān, 1, p. 462.
3. Diwān, 1, p. 426. However, it should be noted that as-Sayyāb tended to use footnotes to explain his allusions, fearing that his audience would otherwise not understand the significance of the allusion. Abū Shabaka, on the other hand, took the understanding of his audience for granted on most occasions. See Chapter V.
and used many other stories from the New Testament to make a particular point in his later volumes, as we shall see later.

Clearly, as-Sayyāb was adopting the same approach as Abū Shabaka towards Biblical allusion, and indeed towards allusion generally, using it in a way which was fundamentally different to that of his Muslim contemporaries, and which bore more resemblance to that of Jīrmān or the other Nahjīr poets. However discussion of this point will be delayed until its proper place in the chapter on allusion and symbolism.

Thus, although we can find several points of similarity between these two poets, there are few distinguishable direct influences, except the last one mentioned above, while the remainder appear to be due to mutual sources or similar psychological and physical experiences, such as the interest of both in European literature and especially Baudelaire, and the bad luck encountered by both men at the hands of love and their sensual desires, so different from their ideals of purity and idealised understanding between the beloved and the lover.

However, the extent of his influence upon the poetic development of as-Sayyāb, as regards mythology and Biblical allusion, should not be underestimated, as these were to assist the latter when he came to employ myth to express his patriotic feelings and personal emotions, from the middle of the 1950s onwards.

* * * * * * * * *
The other great romantic poet of this era was Ibrāhīm Nājī (1893-1953), whose sensibility was quite different to that of Tāhā and Abū Shabaka. Although he too was a romantic, his involvement in his poetry was somehow more immediate and less universal than the previous two poets, who dealt with the universe as seen through their eyes, and through their psychological doubts and the resulting tensions between good and evil, innocence and sin, and happiness and pain in their works. Nājī, on the other hand dealt mostly with love and beauty, and all its delights, joys and happiness, as juxtaposed to its frustrations, pain and sadness. While Nājī's diwān does contain public pieces, they are few, and most of his poems are involved with very personal feelings and experiences, and one cannot help but feel that Nājī's style is perfectly suited to such subjects, whereas his public poems are inclined to appear tepid and plain because his style is basically lyrical, rather than declamatory.

Naturally, such subjectivity could have made Nājī's literary output monotonous and turbid, but this poet had a wide range of vision and his verse enfolds everything within a cloak of artistic creativity, so that his works retain a freshness which could hardly have been achieved by a lesser poet. Like his contemporaries, Nājī had studied classical Arabic literature, and had eagerly devoured the diwān of

Khalil Muṭrān, which, it appears, he learnt by heart. However, he was also acquainted with European, and especially French, literature, and was no doubt influenced by it so that his natural inclination towards romanticism was consolidated, and his vision inspired by the great romantic poets of the west. But he never stooped to simple mimicry of these great masters, but rather drew upon all of them, to produce an art which was truly his, often using the classical nasīh, or the description of ṭalāl, to suit his poetic expression.

For Nājī poetry was something verging on the supernatural, although he once described it simply as the most suitable words in the most suitable order. In an epigraph to Layāli l-Qāhira, Nājī announced, "In my opinion, poetry is the window through which I look out onto life... and from which I gaze down upon eternity... and what is beyond eternity... it is the balsam with which I have treated the wounds of [my] soul, when physicians were scarce." Thus poetry is the reason for the poet’s continued existence, without which he would pine and die away. It is a blessing sent upon him from on high, so that the poet is gifted and sensitive enough to choose his diction by concentrating upon the "souls of words", and upon their inherent music and delicate shades of meaning. Clearly Nājī expounded and wrote

1. See ar-Ramādī, p. 325.
2. See Muqaddima to Diwān Nājī, p. 34. His diwān Layāli l-Qāhira was probably influenced by Musset’s "Les Nuits"; see Abdul Ḥai, Thesis, p. 84-128.
within the bounds of suggestive poetry, rather than within those of the direct statement.

Najf's insistence upon the poet as the principal component in the transportation of the real world into the world of art is probably most clearly stated in his attitude towards Nature. For Najf Nature was only a conglomeration of facts that had to be sifted by the poet, interpreted and then, if necessary, personified, or made to partake in the poet's experience, because Nature is not sufficient in itself, otherwise there would be no need for anything more than mimetic reproduction. ¹ There can be no doubt that Najf practiced what he preached, and one continually finds Nature taking part in the poet's own emotions and attitudes as in "al-'Asifa", in which the psychological state of the poet and Nature are totally intertwined:

Indeed it is sometimes difficult to distinguish between the poet and Nature, who seem equally involved in all the movements of the Universe:

Nature is often portrayed thus in Nājī's verse, that is as sad and deserted, reflecting the poet's feelings of strangeness and alienation, as in the poem "Ilā l-Bahr", in which he wishes to mingle with the sea, and die with the waves:

While the sea is obviously a refuge for Nājī in this poem, it is only temporary, and, although, the poet also longs to combine and unite with Nature generally, his desires are thwarted, and the resulting alienation is stronger than before, so that he becomes a total outsider, who has ceased to be a member of society:

Pastoral imagery abounds throughout Nājī's verse, and is especially connected with his compelling interest in love, its fulfilments, and its total despair. In fact Nājī's love poems are not restricted to discussions of love, but include all his feelings of exile, suffering and alienation, which often venture even into the realms of the metaphysical, wherein his fear of death and his utter inability to answer his questions about the nature of the Universe and Man's destiny therein are faithfully portrayed. In his famous poem, "Min Nūn Ila 'Ayn", which has caused so much speculation as to the identification of the lady 'Ayn, who was Nājī's first and dearest love, the poet questions our own identities, and man's destiny which, having first been written, can neither be erased nor deflected:

As one might have expected, Nājī's attitude to love is typically romantic, and is, for him, ennobling and eternal, and is often described in religious language in his poetry:

1. Dīwān Nājī, p. 197.
2. Ibid., p. 150.
for, indeed, love is boundless and a continual source of inspiration for the poet:

But it can only grow from mutual understanding, which is in turn deepened by the affection between the two lovers:

and is everything, giving meaning to life and to Existence, without which the poet is bereft of all hope and all incentive:

For, when love is gone, the poet is left disappointed and deserted, totally alone in his unhappiness and his suffering:

3. Ibid., p. 267-81.
4. Ibid., p. 126.
5. Ibid., p. 149.
as is the case when his love is repulsed and unwanted:

If one poem had to be chosen to explicate Nājī's attitude towards love, it would surely be "Khitām al-Layāli", in which the poet's tender love, and subsequent loss, are shown sadly and lyrically in six lines:

In this poem the beloved is only partly blamed for their separation, for it had always seemed, from the strangeness of their first meeting, that they would part, hardly knowing each other. In this poem the personality of the beloved is completely unknown and is not even hinted at, so that one wonders if she was not something more than human, an impression that occurs again and again in Nājī's love poetry:

2. Ibid., p. 147.
3. Ibid., p. 139-41.
Is she the Muse, capable of granting inspiration and revealing the secret beauties of Nature? In "Ihā' ad-Dīwān", the diction is indeed reminiscent of European romantic addresses to the Muse:

انت وحى العبترية، وحلل الديبية
انت لحن الحندا الرحمية في الرفسقبية
انت سر تثبت في العقول البشرية

This passionate adoration of the beloved often places her beyond the reach of the poet and ordinary mortals, making her a panacea for all the poet's pains and tribulations, a refuge for him to return to:

ولك ما قلت لشيء، في الموجود عربة
لم اسو ركنا غنييًا بالشنان طبيبا

nelly المفر الدى، لا يُتَلبين
ويضرب البحر موجه متجبا
في وبدت السبا
س الصلب هما اقتربا
من بْيِنها مقتربا

But the poet is not only interested in womankind as related to himself, he is also aware of her psychology and emotions, and, in "al-Mī'ād ad-Dā'i", he understands her fear and her loneliness, as she waits hopelessly for his arrival:

1. Dīwān Nājit, p. 357.
2. Ibid., p. 66-8.
The previous quote shows Nājī's ability to treat the emotional side of women, but he was equally capable of discussing the physical, although his style lacks the sudden, and often disturbing impact of Ṭāhā or Abū Shabaka, in this sphere. In "Liqa' fi l-Layl" we find Nājī describing what is basically a tender, loving caress, couched in sensual imagery and language:

و هناء ما كان أعظمها
وعند المرين فتربت ضمها
بمسةً يلدهد في الظلم;
وحرف مثل عرائس السماء

by the time a woman is pleased
and the strange guest comes
she is overwhelmed with desire
and her face is like the dawn

and, again, in "Fi Ma‘bad al-Layl", Nājī describes the beauty of woman, in verse totally devoid of the pure physicality of Ṭāhā, or the sin-filled tension of Abū Shabaka:

1. Diwān Nājī, p. 143.
2. Ibid., p. 145-6.
From this it is obvious that Nājī was interested in women as innocent and pure spiritually, while also capable of sensual enjoyments and experience. However it would be wrong to claim that this was true of the majority of his poems concerning women, because the bulk of his love poetry depicts women as practically supernatural, and we often find her placed far beyond the poet's reach, often placed there by the poet himself. In "Dhanbī", which we might expect to be a poem about the sins of illicit love, we find the poet asking if it was rather a fault to have adored his beloved as a beautiful and pure manifestation of divine beauty:

\[
\text{لله من أين عينيك تجاوبه هنين نآ رف قلي قبول لنفر في خاناب اشجعا وحيانا}
\]

Indeed the romantic attitude towards women far outpaces the sensual in Nājī's verse, and the reader is left with an impression of delicate and sincere emotions, expressed with great lyricism and simplicity.

Similarly, the metaphysical dimensions of Nājī's verse seldom lack sincerity, and one feels that we are reading about the poet's real feelings and not witnessing an exercise in romantic posturing. As we have seen, like most romantics Nājī suffered from feelings of alienation and doubts about Existence, and, in the poem "ash-Shakk", asks if life is in fact simply a mirage, simply something unreal that we give unfair emphasis to in our affairs:

من أنت؟ من أي عرال ساحر
هدنْت نفسك إلا راحلا بأدا
ماذا يصنع الملوك الظهور بالمالم

and, in "an-Nāv al-Muhtaraq", tells us how he continues to doubt, even when everyone else is satisfied with their answers:

1. Dīwān Nājī, p. 61.
2. Ibid., p. 75.
In fact Nājī often re-iterates his doubts about Existence itself, and about the position of Beauty therein:

Yet he does not despair of final happiness and salvation, and in his famous patriotic poem "Nidā' ash-Shabab" says:

but recognises that such success can only be won through suffering and toil, and wounds proliferate throughout Nājī's diwān:

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1. Diwān Nājī, p. 348.
2. Ibid., p. 142.
3. Ibid., p. 87.
4. Ibid., p. 141.
although he knows that it is only those who suffer greatly that can achieve eventual success, and that we must pray while we suffer, so that we can obtain forgiveness and peace:

\[\text{فَتَوَلَّبَتْ فِي ضَنْدِي العَرَضُ، وَفِي حَمَّالِ دِينَوِيَةَ}
\[\text{وَتَلَبَّتْ فِي سَجَورِ آصْلِي، وَتَلَبَّتْ فِي دَمِي المَسْكَنُ} \]

From what precedes it is clear that, while Nājī's poetry was mostly involved with intensely personal subjects and with his own experiences and emotions, it encompassed other matters and subjects, and we must often study his poetry carefully before passing judgement on its particular theme. However, what is extremely clear is Nājī's masterful control of imagery and diction, to express his intention, and to call up the appropriate reaction in the sensitive reader. Nājī was particularly skillful in using words to produce an effect, as we have seen from "Hulm al-Gharām", where his hopes of lasting and fruitful love, and his fear of separation are succinctly stated in two lines:

\[\text{وَإِذَا بَكِيتْ فَخَرَّتْ بِفُلْحَة} 
\[\text{مَا كَانَ غَرَامًا اِلَّمَا} 
\[\text{مَنْ أَنْبَأَهُ عَنْ الدَّامَسَيْةَ.} \]

Moreover, Nājī used imagery to explain his meaning and to create the atmosphere suitable to a particular poem:

\[\text{مَنْ أَنْبَأَهُ عَنْ الدَّامَسَيْةَ} 
\[\text{مَنْ أَنْبَأَهُ عَنْ الدَّامَسَيْةَ} 
\[\text{مَنْ أَنْبَأَهُ عَنْ الدَّامَسَيْةَ} \]

2. Ibid., p. 264.
3. Ibid., p. 45.
In this quote the poet's increasing distress and restrictions are reflected in the setting stars, casting their waning light on the palms of the poet's hands, and thus the atmosphere is set for the whole poem. An even better example can be found in "Riḥla fī g-Zalām":

"أقبل الليل إلـِّي إلـِّي بـِصدوره الصخـَاب مستـَتر بـِرـَب كـِل راهب الشـَِّيخ، مـِهيـأ يـُسـِير للإحرار، دُلْيَحُو السـَّلَابي، ثـََّـدُو أـَمَّيِّ عـِيـَّانات، عـِنـِّي نـِضـَر شـَـباي.

However Nājī's greatest ally in the creation of atmosphere was his gift for personification which is, arguably, the best in modern Arabic poetry, and is often touchingly delicate and quaint. Clearly, Nājī's verse has a particularly close relationship with Nature, so it is hardly surprising that the objects personified in his verse tend to be objects connected in some way with Nature. In "Kidhb as-Sarāh", the sea itself is endowed with the ability of speech, so that it can answer his questions, and, in return, ask questions of its own:

"البِر اسْتَنْسِيّ مَايِّ مَّرَيّ لـِكَامِـة.

But Nājī's talent for personification is undoubtedly at its best when light or darkness, and the varying degrees of both, are involved. In "Fi Maʿbad al-Layl", we find light feigning sleep out of embarrassment at the lovemaking of the poet and his beloved, while the lamp has become drunk in the peaceful atmosphere:

2. Ibid., p. 55.
while night, and the rest of Nature, rejoice at the happiness of the lovers:

Again, in "Ughniya fi Haykal al-Ḥubb", we find personification of darkness, which cannot bandage the poet's wounds, although it would like to, while the dawn cannot cure them, so that they cause pain both at night and during the day:

Nāji also gave a touching personality to intangible forms and abstractions, such as joy, sadness, loneliness or desire. In "al-Widā" he tells us how joy was like a young child scampering before its parents, the basic idea being similar to that already encountered in "Min Nūn ilā 'Ayn"³, where lovers were described as the parents of their love:

2. Ibid., p. 305.
3. Ibid., p. 149-50.
Sometimes a whole poem is made into a conceit for something else, as in "al-Hanin", in which the poet's longing becomes animate and fundamentally human, plaguing the poet mercilessly, in spite of the poet's previous good treatment thereof:

Finally, in "al-'Awda", we find time described as possessing footsteps, and loneliness is described as a man, climbing the stairs of a deserted house, which is evidently an externalisation of the poet's psychological state:

While it is perhaps true to say that Nāji's inclination to inspired personification "argues an unusual and daring power of personification, too individualistic for the main body of Arabic tradition"\(^4\), his imagery was often within the range of Arabic poetic tradition, although its function in the poem often transcended it. It is clear that Nāji was

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particularly obsessed with seascapes\(^1\), and imagery involving birds\(^2\), both of which often occur with images of light and shade, but the over-riding images of his whole diwan are the mirage (as-sarāb) and the desert (as-sahrā'). Both words are obviously emotive, especially in relation to romantic literature where diction is harnessed to convey emotion and atmosphere as often as a purely direct statement, and are used to good advantage in Nājī's "Mirage Poems"\(^3\), and especially in one called "as-Sarāb fil g-Sahrā'\(^4\), where they appear with several other leitmotifs:

\begin{quote}
السِّرابُ الْخُوَّنُ وَالسَّحَرَاءُ
وَالشَّيْرُ فِي ارْتِهَانِ لِيْلٍ
كَيْفَ الْقُلُوبُ ارْتَغَلَّتْ
وَحِبَّ الْعَامِرُ الْمَلَاكِ
وَالْمَلَاكِ المستنَزَّاتُ الدَّافِئُ
وَالَّذِي زُوَّرْتُ فِي عَيْنِ الْيَمِ
وَالْعَابُ العَفْرِيَ الفَابِلِ الموٍ
\end{quote}

Nājī's penchant for creating fine atmosphere by personification, delicately-balanced diction and powerful imagery was further enhanced by his manipulation of rhyme, metre and rhythm. While Nājī undoubtedly employed the classical qasida a great deal, he tended to do so for shorter compositions, such as "Khitām al-Hubb" or "Hulm al-Charām"\(^5\),

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2. See Ibid., p. 66-7; p. 134; and p. 79.
4. Ibid., p. 56.
5. Ibid., p. 147 and p. 264 resp.
and tended even in these to prefer short metres to the longer types.\(^1\) Nājī sought to introduce and compose in new metrical and stanzaic forms, no doubt under the influence of European literature, and the metrical innovations and experimentation of the precocious poets of the day. Thus he wrote in multirhyme, quatrain, couplet and in a monorhyme format which differed greatly from the traditional \(\text{gasīda}\)\(^2\), although he also composed poetry which adhered totally to the classical Arabic tradition both in metre and rhyme. This lends Nājī's diwān an aura of universality, and reminds us of his deep knowledge of European literature, as well as of his close acquaintance with the great Arab masters. Indeed there is no doubt that Nājī has himself joined the ranks of the great lyricists of the Arabic tradition, like Abū Firās al-Ḥamdānī and Ibn al-Fāriq, for his touchingly simple but lyrical love verses, imbued as it is with his own experiences and with the sincere and romantic expression of his own emotions.

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\textbf{Ibrāhīm Nājī and as-Sayyāb}

Ibrāhīm Nājī has been included in this section, not because he was a direct influence upon as-Sayyāb, but because there are several interesting parallels which can be drawn between the two poets. As-Sayyāb was, obviously, conversant with the poetry of Ibrāhīm Nājī, and was, perhaps, therefore influenced by those aspects of his verse which appealed to him.

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1. For example, \textit{Ibid.}, p. 149-50.
2. For example, see \textit{Ibid.}, p. 45; p. 55; and p. 78-9.
It is clear that both poets drew their influence from both classical and modern Arabic sources, while also benefitting from what was viewed, by them, as suitable in the field of European literature; and shared similar attitudes to the poet and his verse, although as-Sayyāb's stance on this matter was probably at least partly a pose, while Nājī's appears to have been genuine. Likewise both poets believed in metrical experimentation, claiming that the format of a poem should always cohere with, and substantiate the contents of each poem. In doing so both Nājī and as-Sayyāb made ample use of light imagery and pastoral diction to create atmosphere, but their attitude to Nature itself differed radically. As we have discovered Nature could only afford a temporary refuge for Nājī, but it was a permanent one for as-Sayyāb, who returned to it throughout his life, seeking refuge and rest in its peaceful embrace. Thus in 1944 we find as-Sayyāb saying:

\[ ... \]

while the poem "an-Nahr wa-l-Mawt"\(^1\), in the \(\text{diwān} \) Unshūdat al-Matār, still finds him wishing to return to his native Jaykūr, nestling amongst the palm trees near Basra, so that he can find peace in the lap of Nature.

Another similarity between the two poets is their wide use of personification, especially as regards light and night. We have already discussed Nājī's use of this and we can draw a comparison

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1. \(\text{Diwān}, \) 2, p. 303.
2. \(\text{Diwān}, \) 1, p. 453.
between his personification and that of as-Sayyāb, and find that they are very similar, as both poets cause Nature to take part in the poet’s subjective experience, either suffering with them, or increasing their distress or joy.¹

However, the clearest comparison between the two poets is their attitude to love. Both as-Sayyāb and Nājī continually return to praise their first love, remembering their mutual happiness and the pain of the inevitable separation.² It is interesting that both Nājī and as-Sayyāb should have loved relatives who were destined to marry others. We, of course, know the identity of as-Sayyāb’s cousin Wafiqa, but Nājī’s beloved is still only known as ‘Ayn, as her real identity has been kept hidden to protect the lady in question. Perhaps it is the very fact that both these loves were unconsummated that led both poets to idealise them, in face of the frustrations and disappointments which they suffered at the hands of later affairs. In Nājī’s famous poem addressed to ‘Ayn, we find Nājī idolising his beloved as his one, and only, source of comfort and inspiration³, while, in as-Sayyāb’s poem "Shubbāk Wafiqa", we find him telling of the beauty of Jaykūr, and how he longs for Wafiqa’s return, although he knows her to be dead:

1. For example of as-Sayyāb’s personification, see Diwān, 2, p. 98.
2. For further discussion see Handānī, p. 215.
However there is a slight difference in the attitude of the two poets towards women in general. Nājī, while aware of their shortcomings, tended to set women on a pedestal and lament the separation between lovers which was inevitable and fated, while as-Sayyāb came to blame his women for the failure of his affairs, and warned them bitterly that they could never return, because they had repulsed him unfairly.  

Thus, although there are similarities between the two poets as regards their poetry, it would be erroneous to ascribe them to direct influence upon as-Sayyāb, as they appear to grow from mutual sources rather than from direct influence. Nājī was writing within the romantic tradition, and as-Sayyāb was greatly influenced by this tradition at the outset of his career and probably read at least part of Nājī's diwān, but, unlike the case of Tāhā and Abū Shabaka, Nājī does not appear to have cast a strong shadow on the young as-Sayyāb, as far as his verse is concerned, as we shall see more clearly in the next chapter, which deals with the development of as-Sayyāb's romantic style.

1. Diwān, 1, p. 124.
2. This is particularly true of the poems in Asāfīr (Najaf, 1950).
As-Sayyāb: The Romantic Poet

It is clear from the previous chapter that the three great Romantic poets, ‘Alī Maḥmūd Ṭahā, Ilyās Abū Shabaka and Ibrāhīm Nājī, were at least a generation older than as-Sayyāb and his contemporaries, yet the latter fell under their influence and that of the other members of Apollo, and the Northern Mahjar. This leads one to ask why they copied the style of this older generation, when newer genres such as symbolism and realism were already making tentative forays into the light in other areas of the Arab world; and why they were successful in their romantic works. The reasons for this are actually wider in scope than the purely literary environment of Iraq, and extend into the sphere of politics and social circumstances.

Politically, Iraq tended to be separated from the other Arab states, having continued under Ottoman control, however tenuous, until the early twentieth century, while Syria and Egypt, the two centres of literary development, progressed under Western influence or direct control. This, in turn, led to a virtual continuation of the status quo within Iraq itself, and, thus, the udabā' and the literary public were not confronted with new genres or different literary content or style, nor did they feel it necessary to look for new modes of expression.

Furthermore, the ideals of neo-classicism had more to offer in Iraqi poetic circles. During the second half of the nineteenth century poetry had continued to be an effective political and religious force, especially in the Shi‘ite centres of Karbala and Najaf, where the rise

1. For discussion of the importance of Najaf, see ‘Alwān, Ta‘āwur, p. 404.
of new religious movements had encouraged poets to strive towards a poetic style, which would be coherent with the requirements of their society, while remaining within the bounds of classical convention. Mosul and Baghdad had also grown in literary importance, with the influx of European, and especially Presbyterian, churches into the area, as had been the case fifty years earlier in Lebanon and Syria; and, as in the latter, this led to interest in new literary types, instigated by translation of European liturgies, hymnals and such like.\(^1\)

However the strong Neo-classical trend, embodied in the works of the earlier modern poets, especially Ma‘rūf ar-Rusāfī and Jamīl Šīdqī az-Zahāwī, retained its attraction, although the works of Muḥammad Mahdī al-Jawāhirī (1900 —) now stood practically alone as regards poetic merit and relevance to contemporary society.\(^2\) But it was obvious that such a situation could not continue indefinitely, and when western ideas and technology began to filter through in Iraq, along with translations from European literary texts, and the poetry and criticism of the Mahjar, Apollo and other romantic belle-lettres, an attack, however exploratory, upon the prevalent literary criteria was inevitable.

As new material and ideological features appeared Iraqi society found itself following a path similar to that taken by the western Arab

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1. For details of the cultural and literary activities of the Christian missions in Iraq at this time, see al-Hilāf, ‘Abd ar-Razzāq, Ta‘rīkh al-Ta‘līm fi l-‘Irāq fi l-‘Ahd al-‘Uthmānī (1638-1917) (Baghdad, 1959), index.

2. It is interesting to note that al-Jawāhirī was writing at the same time as the three great romantic poets discussed in the previous chapter. This would seem to indicate how the literary environment of Iraq, at that time, lagged behind Egypt and Greater Syria, as far as genres are concerned.
states half a century, or more, before. The fundamental changes in its structure and norms had a profound effect on every member of the community, but were particularly strong amongst the thinkers and the writers. Such sudden and widespread alterations in their daily lives often left them bewildered and feeling unsure of their exact place in the world generally; a situation which was exacerbated by the presence of the British, and the belief that the latter were simply exploiting Iraq to their own ends. As a result the youth of Iraq, and especially the intelligensia, felt themselves particularly drawn to the romantic literature that was at last becoming available to them, whether it was translations from European sources, or original works by other Arab writers. 1

However, it seems more probable that the young poets of the late 1930s and 1940s were more influenced by the works of Arab romantic poets, than by prose translations from European literatures, although the verse translations of important poets were also influential. As these grew in number in Iraq during the Second World War the young writers began to copy both their style and their content, and to widen their horizons as far as literature was concerned. 2 While it should be emphasised that much of this output bears the marks of imitation and a certain superficiality, there were many outstanding poems published in Iraqi newspapers and literary magazines, while several were even published outside Iraq, sometimes separately and sometimes as collections; the most important of which were as-Sayyāb’s

1. For discussion of the young poets and their position in society, see ‘Alwān, Ṭaṭawur, p. 407–8.
2. Translations from French and English literature were particularly numerous. For details, see Ibid., p. 405 ff.
Azhār Dhābila, Buland al-Ḥaydarf’s (b. 1926) Khafcat at-Tīn and Nāzīk al-Malā’ika’s (b. 1923) Ashqat al-Layl.\(^1\) Such literary output accustomed the Iraqi public to the sort of poetry already appreciated by their counterparts in the other literary centres of the Arab world, with their more varied, and, indeed, more relevant themes, and associated formats.

It was in this atmosphere that as-Sayyāb first started writing poetry seriously. As-Sayyāb, like most young Iraqi writers at this time, had received a good education in the intricacies of Arabic grammar and prosody, and had, no doubt, enhanced this by wide reading, so that what strikes us immediately about his juvenilia, in spite of some minor errors, is his control of metre, diction and rhyme. In this there are definite echoes from the great masters of the past, which can be heard, to an increasingly lesser degree, throughout his literary career. However, the themes and content of his verse at this time drew their inspiration from more modern times, and especially from the poetry and criticism of the romantics of the previous generation.

The early forties found our poet scribbling away whenever possible, usually on particular themes, such as Nature, the beauty of women, and their infidelity, the transfiguring power of love and the sufferings caused thereby, nostalgia for lost halcyon days, doubts about existence, and vague longings and feelings of alienation. All of these were treated within the romantic convention, although, as we shall see, he

was not merely copying the literature of others, but shyly probing
the possibilities of self-expression.

As was to become the case towards the end of his life, as-Sayyāb's
whole attitude towards life was intimately bound up with his natural
surroundings, among the palm groves of Basra. For him life was that
of the shepherd, the farmer and those who were involved with village
life generally, and we continually encounter descriptions of the rif
and of rather idealised rural life in his Bawākīr1, as in "Amīr Shāṭl
al-'Arab":

Understandably Nature was a refuge for the young as-Sayyāb, a
quiet corner far from the troubles and the city, and from life generally.
In "Shu'ā' adh-Dhikrā" he tells of the beauty of the rif, and how its
fragrance and vegetation make the hours pass idyllically:

1. This was published in volume 2 of as-Sayyāb's complete Diwān
(Beirut, 1974); also Āthār al-Rīḥ (1971), and Aʿāqīr (1972), which
are also included in the Diwān.
Indeed, like the romantics of Europe, as-Sayyāb even saw God in Nature:


and found it a continual source of inspiration, as he elucidates in "al-Wardā al-Manthūra":

Beauty of all kinds was a source of inspiration, but the beauty of women and of Nature were particularly closely associated in his mind, so that his rural surroundings tended to remind him of his lost love:

2. Ibid., p. 135.
4. Ibid., p. 139.
From these quotes it is abundantly clear that the young as-Sayyāb was, in fact, expressing his own feelings and experiences by means of natural verse, and by building up a sympathetic atmosphere and environment from the world of Nature. Thus, in "Saʿīda", we find the poet describing a morning, in which the trees sway and the drizzle is shaken from the roses by a strong wind, thus externalising the poet's personal emotion:

\[
\text{منى نَبُسمْتُ أَشْغَتْهُ وَطَاباً، وَامِرْحَبَتْ مَلَكَ الْبَلْدَةُ، وَأَزَهَّرَ بِذَاتِ الْطَلَّ، فِيهَا، وَقَلَبَ دَائِمَ الْحَمْيَانَ أَضْحَى.}
\]

Nature was, usually, a medium for as-Sayyāb's own thoughts and reactions to this world, a world in which he felt strange and somehow alien, as had the forerunners of romantic verse in Europe. Most of his verse, at this time, is imbued with a sense of not belonging, and of pessimistic isolation, which is apparently due to no fault of the poet himself, nor to any precise cause. In "Shuʿʿa' adh-Dhikrā", we find as-Sayyāb cleaving to the empty wastes, which it is tempting to interpret as his life, fleeing from the society and misunderstanding of man:

\[
\text{اخْتَلَفَ رُوحُ السُّؤُومَ الْوَحَدَةُ، وَالْحَزِبُ للْأَسَى، وَالْعَيْنَاءُ، وَالْتَنْفُقُ، وَالْمَتَّادِيَ وَالْكُسْتَاسِيَّ.}
\]

1. Diwan, 2, p. 316.
2. Ibid., p. 199.
Similarly, he often restates his doubts and insecurities in this Universe and in justice and parity therein, and in "Rithā' Jaddatī" we find him asking his heart why it blames him when it is Fate that has visited this suffering upon it:

١

وَالَّذِي تَشْعُرُ الْذُّنُوبُ يَمِينِي؟

لاِنْعَمَّيْنِي فَنَسَبٌ تَعَمُّلَ اللَّهُ

Again, in "Khāvāluqī", as-Sayyāb expresses his belief that Fate has not dealt fairly with him when he says:

٢

فَرَبَحَالِهِ نَالَهُدَرَ لاَ تَغْفِرُ لَهُ

It is surprising that a youth of approximately seventeen years of age, should dwell at such length on nostalgic reminiscences of past joys and love, as, for example, in "adh-Dhikrā", he begins with the image:

٣

أَطْلَتْ مِنْ نَافِذَةِ الْنَّفْسِ الْمَعَامَاتُ

فِي رَمَضَانِ عَرَضَتْ لِيِ بَيْتُ

and again, in "Dhikrayāt ar-Rif":

٤

مَنْطَعُ مِنِ اللَّاهِي مِنْيِ بِنَائَرِ

وْتُقَبُّ فِي نَبَيِّ بِسَمَّاَءِ

1. Diwān, 2, p. 103.
2. Ibid., p. 151.
3. Ibid., p. 132.
4. Ibid., p. 118.
Such attitudes are, obviously, being treated within the traditional framework of romanticism, with its obscure longings and languishing nostalgia and alienation, but his treatment of love and womankind in his juvenilia is more individualistic, and so more truly romantic. At this time, as indeed throughout his life, love was the pivot of as-Sayyāb's existence, capable of changing stature, and even the Universe itself.

As one might have expected love proved an inspiration for his artistry:

1. اسکری روعی بالهوى زینا وعمّا الهاى ونَّفر الحلم

and is the pure union of two hearts, as in "Ilavki Shakāti":

1. بزرّته طهر الهوى المتفعّج فلا تفعّله صوحه المنتجّ

being, in fact, the only fundamental emotional impetus in life, without which life would be impossible:

2. وولوا حیاى في الدهى مكل عادئي لذاب مع الإنفاس ذلب بأصلّي

But this idealisation did not blind as-Sayyāb to the bitter facts of life, of which he was painfully aware, for his exploratory experiences of love had taught him of parting, disappointment and frustration.

2. Ibid., p. 115.
How often he sighs about his disillusionments, as in "Thawra 'alā Hawā", in which he complains of his broken heart:

وعُرتُ على بنيته العُلمُ
 فأعترسَ حيالي أيها الألمُ

and the bitterness and emnity which he feels towards fair women:

سَكَرت بجمعة شرِّها الانفُمُ
ما نفيك الاكل مُلبِني

which leads him to seek revenge, not only against his unfaithful beloved, but against all the fairer sex:

في عند كل جميلة تراها
فتي وابن، وكيان انتقم

Woman is here portrayed as a temptress, beguiling men for pleasure and then breaking their hearts, but her beauty is so intense that it is they, rather than she, who feel they should beg forgiveness:

وأكاد هن نصولها أجمُ
وبرعوني ما هبلغه الكلام

Yet, the beauty of women is not always tainted and perverted, and, in "al-Mandil al-Ahmar", his sweetheart is described as follows:

and, in another poem, she is presented as the healer of the poet's wounds and suffering:

while, in yet a third, he announces:

Furthermore, his women are not merely another manifestation of beauty, they are flesh and blood. One example of this comes from "‘Awdat ad-Dīwān", in which as-Sayyāb describes the enviable journey of his book of verse among the virgins:

2. Ibid., p. 300-2.
3. Ibid., p. 320.
4. Ibid., p. 176-8.
From all that has preceded it is clear that as-Sayyāb, while falling under the spell of romantic poetry, which idealises women by emphasising only their good qualities, was also influenced by poets like Ţāhā and Abū Shabaka, who recognised the torments of the flesh and the pain of disillusionment in love; especially the former who positively relished both the joys and his subsequent melancholic distress. It is also obvious that as-Sayyāb’s own early experiments in love also inclined him to such a stance, so that his vituperative verse rings truer than his more anaemic description of the feminine charms of his beloved, as is also true of his more sensual passages.

The survey of as-Sayyāb’s early verse, and especially his pastoral poems, which so often involved a beloved, has thus clarified some aspects of his style as well. On the whole the imagery of this era is good, if somewhat sweet for the modern palate, predominantly pastoral, invoking flowers, palms, meadows and such like, and basically pictorial. His favourite method is the simile, rather than the true metaphor, a feature that is apparent in even his last few poems, and is particularly well-exemplified in the following abyāt, written in 1943:

From this we can also see how he employed imagery to set atmosphere, choosing his diction carefully, although hardly with the genius of his

later years. Unlike other romantic Arab poets as-Sayyāb seldom resorted to the personification of objects, but was still, usually, successful when he felt forced to do so. Thus, in "'Alā r-Rābiya", night is endowed with the faculty of speech:

\[ ... \]

and, in another poem, a diwān is given the power of hearing and perception:

\[ ... \]

The same is true of his use of the narrative poem, and the examples found amongst his Bawākir are usually extremely European, both in content and in the treatment of the theme.\(^2\) However, the monologue was already unmistakably his favourite form, and the bulk of his verse discussed his most intimate emotions in the first person singular, so that any dialogue that appears is a rhetorical device, rather than a life-like conversation between two people, as can be seen in "'Alā r-Rābiya", while the rhetorical question, as one might expect, recurs again and again.

As for his verse forms, they are mostly after the style of the classical gasīda. Those which ignore the hemistich while adhering to the accepted monorhyme are, for the most part, short lyrical pieces, as are his stanzaic poems, whereas his longer compositions tend to be either in the classical monorhyme and monometre, or in various strophic

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1. Diwān, 2, p. 98 and p. 179 resp.
forms. Therefore we can deduce that as-Sayyāb was already looking for new verse forms, more suited to his artistic expression, and more relevant to his experiences and those of the Arabs generally, although there is no evidence of the great breakthrough to be made in "Hal Kāma Ḫubbān?" in Ashār Dḥābila.

It was in his first published diwān, Ashār Dḥābila, that as-Sayyāb was first to break new ground, in both the themes and the style of his poetry, although the period of composition overlaps that of his juvenilia, discussed in the previous section. However, here we intend to discuss this diwān as presented in the collection Ashār wa-Asāṭīr, which included the poems which as-Sayyāb believed to be most important and talented from his first diwān, published in 1947, and his second, Asāṭīr, published in 1950.

As we might have expected, most of the poetry written between 1943 and 1947 in this volume shows little change from his work unpublished at that time, although they are generally of a higher standard. As-Sayyāb continued in the same romantic vein, talking of his doubts, his desires, his loves and the beauties and virtues of Nature, and about his feelings of alienation and his disillusionment. Nature remains basically idyllic:

1. For examples see Diwān, 2, p. 112-113; p. 105-107; p. 434-443; and p. 152-155.
3. This collection was published in Beirut in 1964. This selection would seem more suitable for discussion, as it prevents repetition, as the style of the two volumes is basically the same.
but there is a growing tendency towards approaching Nature in a less ingenuous, and thus more effective, way, although traces of languishing romanticism remain:

"أضلاع المقول، بأشعة الفلاح في السراجات من إسحارة...
1 اقبلي فنربيع ما نزال في الوادي، فلبي صداق قبل اعتضاره"

However, the city and its associated evils were beginning to overshadow the delights of his native rif, with its crowded, yet lonely streets, and its impersonality; as depicted in "Fi s-Sūq al-Qadim":

"الليل والسوق القديم
فتننت به الأصوات الإغدامات الغابرين
وخلاء الغريب وما تبعث呼吸 من نظم عززين
في ذلك الليل السهيم".

In this poem as-Sayyāb can only dream of his beautiful, southern environment, with its lush greenery and peaceful moonlit nights:

"مثل تبوج به السنابل قمت أصواء الغروب
تجمع الغربان فيه
تذين ضرلك في ارتخاء مثل أوراق الخريف"

1. Dīwān, 1, p. 106.
2. Ibid., p. 76.
for the city is melancholy and impassive, and is described in terms of man, and objects manufactured by him:

But love, and his feelings towards women, have not yet been superseded by other interests, and, in spite of a development towards a more oblique style, as-Sayyāb is totally involved with love and his experiences therein, in both Azhār Dhabila and Asāṭīr. In "Ahwā" he talks of his beloved, who is an inspiration and, also a source of his sad verse:

While, in another poem, he tells his beloved how she should treat her lover, and provide him with a calm refuge, in which he may find relaxation and comfort:

1. Diwān, 1, p. 21, p. 24, and p. 21 resp.
because she is an ideal creature, capable of surpassing even Nature in her beauty:

although she too often chooses to withhold her favours and her comfort, leaving man to suffer and mourn:

In spite of this he still searches for his ideal woman, wandering the streets and scouring every crowd, looking for her, because she must be his fate:

and because she too is alone, and waiting for him:

as-Sayyāb knows that she must also be suffering the pangs of loneliness and longing, because, in his opinion, love is the union of two hearts:

and still a dream of eternity:

In this way love cannot die, only the passion can change with time, and fade:

So that only a faint echo remains:

سُوٰن اًسِي وَتُسِين اللَّهَيْنِ الائِدَ
فِي شَنَاهُ الصِّحَائِيْدَ - وَإِلَٰهِ الرَّيْدِ.

Obviously, as we saw in hisjuvenilia, as-Sayyāb is still more involved with the end of love and the parting of lovers, than with its joys and fulfilsments, and paradoxically he is often to be found warning his beloved that, having left, she may never return, or rekindle his love for her:

يَبْسَحُنَّ فِي عَيْنِيَّ مِنْ قَلْبِيْنَ ، وَعَنَاءُ ثُقِيمٍ ؛
عَنْ مَهْدِيَّ مَهْدٍ ، وَعِشْقُيَّ فِي صَبْبَاءِ الأَذْكُرِيَّاتِ
بَنَائِيْنَ ؛ وَيَسْفَرُ ثُمَّ يَفْتَنُهُ السَّمَتُ عَمْقِيْ
وَالبَابُ نُصُدُّهُ وَرَآءَكَ فِي الظَّلَامُ يَدَا صَدِيقٍ

1. Diwān, 1, p. 16-17.
2. Ibid., p. 69.
3. Ibid., p. 75.
It was probably just such feelings of bitterness that led as-Sayyāb to describe her treatment of him rather harshly in "Fi s-Sūq al-Qadīm":

... اتَّوَّهَ اسْمَعِيَ ابْنَيَا اللَّهُ الْمَلِكِ الْمُهْبِبِ لَعْنَةَ إِنِّي رَجِيَّ بَلْ إِبْنَيَا الرَّجُلُ الْمُغْرِبِ إِنِّي لَعِيرِكَ.. بَيْدَ أَنَّكَ سَوْفَ تَفْقِيَ دُنْ تَسْيِرَ!

for she has left him wondering if it had really been love, or simply a vain passion:

هل نُسِمِنْ الَّذِي التَّقَى هَيَاماً؟
أم جُنُنا بالخَماجِ؟ أم غَرَا؟
ما يكونَ الْحَبِّ؟ دُوِّةً وَابْتِزَاماً؟

From all this it is quite clear that his feelings of alienation had been somewhat crystallised by his stay in Baghdad, away from all he was accustomed to, and, somehow, his verse now rings more true:

سَوْفَ اسْمِنِي.. اسْمِنِي الْحَرْبُ تَناَدِيَنِي بَعْدًاً
في ظَلَامِ الطَّابِعِ الدَّلَّانِ.. والْمُعْلُوْبُ الطَّويل
يَنَزَّلُ جَعِيرَانِ.. وَالْحَزَنُ باَيْوَىٰ وَالْأَفْوَل
بَسْرَةِ الْخَمْمَ كَأَتَبَقَرَ رَجُعُي مُتَّفُتَانِ
فَاَتَرْكَنِي اَقْلَعُ اللَّيْلِ وَهُيَّانَاً

1. Diwān, 1, p. 27.
2. Ibid., p. 101.
3. Ibid., p. 47.
although we can still find alienation expressed in a rather derivative style:

Indeed his present life sometimes appeared so strange to him and so disconnected from his past, that he began to doubt if there was any life left to him:

Naturally, he tended to look back towards what was, to him, normality and peace, that was his native countryside, and begged his beloved to remind him of it, by her conversation:

although he recognised that, even in his own area, there could be no return to either lost loves, or lost joys:

1. Diwān, 1, p. 31.
2. Ibid., p. 17.
3. Ibid., p. 60.
But is he really looking for a return to the past, or is his longing actually for something less certain, and less clearly defined? For the first time, as-Sayyāb begins to question his heart as to his real desires, but finds no answer forthcoming:

And, slowly, begins to recognise that he lacks the power to achieve his aim, whatever it really is:

however hard he strives towards her, or it:

and that, until he surrenders, he will suffer while he toils:

1. Diwān, 1, p. 55.
2. Ibid., p. 93-96.
3. Ibid., p. 76.
Obviously the shades of the negative romanticism which pervaded Arabic romanticism during this period, have remained in his heart and ruled the verse in this diwān, as in his Bawākīr. But as-Sayyāb is now relying more and more on an intensely personal style, and upon the continual flow of ideas and images, which draw their power from precise diction, and their ability to evoke reactions in the mind of the reader, through inherent sense or sound, rather than by the more purely pictorial imagery of his juvenilia. In fact his imagery is now developing a quality which is both striking and provocative, as in "Sajin":

وانت اتقاء الفردا بالسيا، على الآل; في تأثيمات الفقار،
وطال انتظاري كأن الارمان تدشى ملم يبق إلا انتظار!  

or "‘Aynān Zarqāwān", in which he describes his beloved's eyes:

عينانّ .. ام غاب بينام على ورمان من ظلال؟
ساح تلمش بالسكون المدهف، ور نشال
الأضواء وأيها يسيل على قيناث في الميال.

1. Diwān, 1, p. 28.
2. Ibid., p. 79.
3. Ibid., p. 64.
Night appears again and again in his poems, as does mist and the lonely road, all of which are included in the following quote:

في ليالي الخريف المزين
حين يطفئ على الفيلين
كالضباب النقي
في رياضة الطريق
في رياضة الطريق الطويل؛

indeed, light and darkness are juxtaposed throughout this volume, and in every volume, although this image is particularly fine:

نار من الدهر كأطلال
كرتاد جلي دونما حلم
جذلان يرتقي عارى القدم
يهدي ضئاي ولو الظلم

His new command of diction also enhanced his ability to paint an atmosphere with words, but now instead of trying to uncover his feelings by similes, we find him moulding his metre and his words to actually express his emotions and experiences, so that in "Itba‘inī" for example, he can set the atmosphere for the whole poem in a matter of lines:

ابعيني
فالضحى رأيت به الذكري على شطّ بعيد

1. Diwān, 1, p. 65.
2. Ibid., p. 55.
Clearly as-Sayyāb had begun to encounter the works of T. S. Eliot by 1948, when he wrote this poem, although this will not be discussed just yet, as it falls more suitably within the scope of the chapter on symbolism. But what is particularly noticeable from the above quotation is that as-Sayyāb had already developed the style which was so markedly his from now on, and which turns his poems into a succession of peaks and troughs, usually starting on a high, thrusting note, followed by a less striking tone, which, in turn, proceeds to a new pinnacle, whether it be strong, as in the section quoted from "Fi s-Sūq al-Qadīm"^2, or quiet, as in our previous quotation. His introduction of ash-Shi‘r al-Hurr into Arabic verse had, of course, facilitated this new style, which was to prove so well-suited to as-Sayyāb's expression, as well as to the numerous echoes from Eliot, which were beginning to reverberate around his poems^3, although he still

2. *Ibid.*, p. 28. This qasīda is perhaps the best example of this feature in this collection.
continued to compose in the more classical metres and in strophic verse, stanzaic or otherwise.1

As-Sayyāb was now poised to soar to even higher poetic heights. He had claimed that he named his first diwān Azhār Dhābila because "the earth, the sky, the soil, the water, stone and air [were all] faded flowers, faded in my dull eyes and in my torpid immobile soul."2 There was to be no such lassitude in his next diwān, Unshūdat al-Mātār, with its fierce commitment of conscience to his society, the Arab nation and mankind generally, and its passionate and intimate personal style.

After the publication of Asāṭīr in 1950 as-Sayyāb's verse suddenly fulfilled its promise and burst forth into full bloom. In Asāṭīr as-Sayyāb was slowly groping towards a new style capable of expressing the themes with which he was intensely involved, such as the impersonality of city life, the debilitating effects of frustration in love, and nostalgia for his supposedly carefree days in the South. In doing so, he sought to find in his new style of free verse rhythmic and rhyming verse forms, in which he could explicate all the ideals and sensations experienced during the formative years of the 1940s. This in turn bore even more succulent rewards when he turned his attention outwith himself, to the situation of Iraq, and other Arab states, as compared to the rest of the world, and to the moral questions affecting society and, indeed, mankind during the post-War years.

1. For examples of classical qasīda see Diwān, 1, p. 61-62; examples of strophic verse are too numerous to mention as the rest of the diwān is divided between this verse form (with classical metres) and his new free verse, based on the taf‘ila, and not the line.

2. Quoted from ‘Abbās, Ḥṣān, as-Sayyāb, p. 81.
This stage of as-Sayyāb's career is usually considered as his "realist" or "committed" stage, as opposed to his earlier "romantic", or subsequent "subjective" phase. Yet these clichés are, perhaps, too involved with theme, and ignore the fact that romanticism is not restricted to a certain specified content, however true this may have proved in the case of the bulk of Arabic romantic literature, but is in fact a particular attitude towards life. In Prometheus Unbound, for example, Shelley was not writing limp, nostalgic love poetry or idyllic pastoral verse, but an epic poem which grew from passionately held moral and philosophical beliefs, and, similarly as-Sayyāb's Ḥaffār al-Cubūr, al-Kūmah al-ʿAmya or "Unshūdat al-Ṭanar" should not be dismissed as being outside the romantic convention simply because he widened the thematic scope of his verse.

As-Sayyāb, like his contemporaries, was, at this time, deeply influenced by the rapidly changing environment around him, and by the ever increasing calls for a more relevant literature, involved with the important issues of the day. Most of the Arab states had, by the late 1940s, total political independence yet they were beginning to doubt if they were really autonomous, as Europe continued to cast her shadow upon them, even after the end of World War II. This discontent was inflamed by the Palestine War and the subsequent defeat of the Arab cause in 1948, which forced the Arabs to seek to assert their

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1. Hasan Tawfiq views this stage of as-Sayyāb's literary career as his "realistic phase", which can be termed "Marxist" or "Tammūzite" according to the poem concerned. See "Badr Shākir as-Sayyāb wa-Ḥarakat ash-Shīʿr al-Ḥurr", al-Majalla, Jan. 1968, p. 38. M. K. Badawi describes the poetry of this stage as "socially and politically committed", M.A.P., p. 252.

2. See M.A.P., p. 204 ff., for discussion.
full independence and to seek to regain their proper standing in the modern world in literature, as well as in military and social affairs. Towards this end, they set out to develop their countries without making allowances for the concurrent changes in society, which proved an inevitable side effect. As traditional values crumbled even further, the Arabs, like the rest of the world, found themselves under the cloud of the nuclear bomb, whose existence awakened all the populations of the world to the terrifying and totally devastating results of modern warfare. The days for hiding heads in the sand had passed, and the calls for more commitment in literature, which had been heard intermittently throughout the previous decade, rose to a clamour.1

The subjectivity of the previous era had outlived its usefulness and was too much of a negative factor for the new, positive thinking Arab poets, who sought to assert their confictions through the more malleable features of free verse, unrestrained by the rules of convention. At the same time they discovered T. S. Eliot's The Waste Land. Eliot had first drawn their attention because of an article published by Luwīs ‘Awād in 1946, but it was not until the 'fifties that his poetry and criticism was widely translated, and the results were tremendous. His ideas were soon discussed wherever men of letters congregated, and were often heatedly debated in literary journals and magazines, while a veritable flood of pseudo-Eliot poems appeared in Arabic, some of which were successful, while some were but patriotic and superficial parodies.2

The subjective verse of the previous era retreated before the fierce hostility facing it on all sides, and, on the whole, began to disappear into the past. Some poets continued to write the same sort of subjective verse, but most turned their eyes towards new and committed themes, often experimenting with symbolism or surrealism, both of which were now filtering through from the West. As we shall see, in spite of his rather naïve understanding of their criticism and poetry, as-Sayyāb turned mainly to Edith Sitwell and T. S. Eliot for his inspiration, drawing especially upon the symbolic features of their work, but he also depended heavily upon his own experiences, and upon his own vision of the Universe and the problems facing it. It is probably this dependence upon his personal attitudes that accounts, partly, for the greater success of the shorter monologues of Unshūdat al-Maṭar, when compared to some of the longer qasīdas¹, which were also published separately in the early 1950s, and tended to draw heavily on external influences, literary and otherwise.

As-Sayyāb was undoubtedly committed to his nation, and to mankind generally, throughout his life, and composed political and social poems both before and after Unshūdat al-Maṭar, but it was in this diwān that his conscience forced him into the very centre of the fray so that, for a limited period, it blotted out all else.² It was, for him, a time of intense ideological debate and involvement in questions concerning politics and, indeed, the whole of Existence³, a time for contemplation and conviction.

2. For an early example of such verse, see Diwān, 2, p. 108; for a later example see Ibid., p. 197 (dated 1962), and p. 309 (dated 1963).
The days filled with complaints against erstwhile beloveds are past and the women in as-Sayyāb's verse are now those misused by all society, or by a portion thereof. There is only one poem in this collection which even approaches a love poem, and that is "Urus ff l-Garya" and it has, in fact, very little to do with love, being actually an attack upon society, which encourages women to marry for material benefits rather than for love, thus cutting off any man who really loves her. This poem exhibits various features which fall within the modern Arabic romantic traditions. The bride, for example, is described as "the daughter of the Rif", which will lie deserted when her light is withdrawn from it, while her marriage will only bring about the death of old loves:

مات حب قدِيم* ومات النهار
شلما تطبعى الريح ضوء السموغ

because she has been sold for a handful of gold:

زهدت بـا صفِنة من نضار:
خاتم في سوار وقصر مشيد
من عظام العبيد
وهُبى ياردب من هولاء العبيد!

Yet, although the poet weeps at his own desolation, the poem is free from the posturing of the previous era, and as-Sayyāb is obviously emphasising the social aspects of marriage, giving them precedence over affairs of the heart, which totally disappear from the remainder of this diwān.

1. Dīwān, 1, p. 344 ff.; quoted, p. 345.
In Fājr as-Salām we had already found women used to emphasise man’s inhumanity, and were to find it again in al-Asliḥa wa-l-Atfāl, but both Ḥaffār al-Ṣubūr and al-Mūmīs al-‘Amyā present a more distinctive use of womankind.

In al-Mūmīs al-‘Amyā as-Sayyāb is very much involved with the position occupied by women in Arab society, and asks why women should be placed below men, relegated to the brothels or to the degradation of slavery or beggary, and answers ironically that it is "God", while he is actually emphasising that it is in fact the work of men, who seek to cast their fault upon God:

ومن الذي جعل النساء دون الرجال، فلا سبيل إلى الرغيب سوى البناء؟
الله - عز وجل - شاء
لا يكن سوى بذايا أو هواضن أو إما:
اوراءمات يسببح عفاؤهن المترفون
او سائرات يشتههن الرجال الحسنون؟!

He seeks to clarify this injustice by narrating the story of Salīmā, the daughter of a poor peasant who has, previously, been killed for alleged poaching, so that Salīmā, being left unprotected, is then raped by a soldier, and is, consequently, forced to seek her livelihood through prostitution, having been deprived of the respectability of marriage through no fault of her own. As a young and beautiful woman she is quite successful, and is described as an ideal beauty:

1. See Diwān, 2, p. 252 ff.; and Diwān, 1, p. 574 ff. resp.
2. Diwān, 1, p. 522.
who had dreamt girlish dreams of an idyllic life in a prince's palace, fed on pure honey, and dressed in flawless silk. But, as she ages, she loses her beauty and grows blind, going pathetically from place to place, seeking customers.

In this poem as-Sayyāb actually seeks to understand the psychology of the character he has created, and does not simply describe her external features or a subjective reaction to her, and depicts a touching scene, in which she tries to encourage men to come with her, forgetting how she has aged, before she is suddenly reminded by her hacking cough:

He also endows her with a virulent wish for revenge against men, who have reduced her to this state, a desire which alone keeps her alive:

1. Dīwān, 1, p. 534.
2. Ibid., p. 537-8.
Yet is marriage so enticing a prospect? As-Sayyāb thinks not, and reminds us that, while it is the best status for women:

Yet is marriage so enticing a prospect? As-Sayyāb thinks not, and reminds us that, while it is the best status for women:

it is other women's husbands who are the customers of prostitutes:

Thus it is the lot of all women misused by men that as-Sayyāb is bewailing, and, so, refused to condemn the prostitutes simply because of their trade, seeing them as victims, rather than basically immoral women:

1. Diwān, 1, p. 527.
2. Ibid., p. 522-3.
because they too were once pure children, dearly loved by their fathers:

لا بد يعود بما استطاع من المهادا في المساء
لا بد يقبل وجه طفليته الندى أو الجبيين.

However, as-Sayyāb's interest is not confined solely to the fate of womankind in this *gasīda*, but also extends into a denouncement of poverty in a society where riches are the only criteria for justice:

فِئَلِ الرَّجُلِ وَأَهْلَ قَرْيَتِهِ هُمْ سَبِيلُهُمُّ ؛ وَمِنْ أَيْشَاءٍ - وَمِنْ أَيْشَاءِ هُمْ سَبِيلُهُمُّ - وَمِنْ أَيْشَاءِ الرَّجُلِ وَأَهْلَ قَرْيَتِهِ بَالْبَيْنِ وَالْأَطْمَارِ يَؤُتُّونَهُمْ، وهُمْ مَحْلُولُونَ، وَهُمْ مَحْلُولُونَ. وَهُمْ مَحْلُولُونَ، وَهُمْ مَحْلُولُونَ، وَهُمْ مَحْلُولُونَ، وَهُمْ مَحْلُولُونَ.

and into commitment to the Arab nation, now so deprived of pride that it allows any passing foreigner to consort thus with its womenfolk:

من ضابع العربية السماء، لدِئِلِيعضراً
لا تسترَوَّنَّ فالضي نسيبٌ
من ناقِ، وعِجاهر، ونبيٌ
عربيه أنا، امتي دوماً
خير الدجا... كحيوت أبٍ.

3. *Ibid.*, p. 536-7. This is, of course, an oblique statement about the position of the Arab states after the Second World War: independent, but materially dependent on the West.
So, although as-Sayyāb's intention was, superficially, to discuss the position of women in Arab society, we now find that there is a second, more subtle theme running through the weave of the whole nasīda. The prostitute is no longer just the ill-fated and miserable woman, so typical of the romantic sensibility, nor the medium for a social statement about the unjust treatment of her sex, she is Iraq, or some other Arab state, apparently endowed with independent action, while being forced into a secondary role, acting in accordance with the desires of more powerful countries. Once this is grasped the parallels between the prostitute and the state are endless; thus the young girl dreaming of good fortune becomes Iraq longing for independence and dreaming of progress and riches, while the blind, aging prostitute becomes the Iraq of the time, free but still depending upon the good will and caprice of the colonial powers of the past, but which will, eventually, wreak its revenge.

Seen thus al-Kūmīs al-‘Amyā becomes a magnificent and intricate masterpiece, to be interpreted on, at least, two different levels, and the same is true of another of his longer creations, Haffār al-Qubur (1952), in which a prostitute also appears, although this time she is a very secondary character. The grave digger is a thoroughly dislikable person, who not only makes a living from burying the dead, which is harmless enough in itself, but longs and prays for a war, so that he can take himself off to the city and revel in sexual self-gratification. In this nasīda the prostitute is merely an object of the grave digger's desires, and of his sexual frustrations, which are described strikingly, as are his hopes for physical pleasure. Furthermore, she symbolises

1. See Diwān, 1, 554-6.
how the grave digger's malignant self-interest will be turned upon him in the case of a war or such like, because it is her body that is brought to the unsuspecting grave digger for burial, and whose interment furnishes him with the money he requires to pay for his sensual enjoyment, and which had, originally, come from his hand, as payment for previous revelry. In this way as-Sayyāb again uses a deceptively simple narrative to hide a deeper, and more significant theme, as the grave digger personifies the merchants of war, the owners of armament factories and such like, who can only see war as a source of quick profit, and are blind to the possibility of self-destruction, that of their way of life and of their families, in just such a war. While, on the other hand, the shadowy figure of the prostitute stands for mankind, which suffers from the mercenariness of the warmongers but is, yet, not totally innocent, because it does nothing to curtail or prevent the machinations of the former.

While the second poem is not as satisfying as the first, being marred by as-Sayyāb's somewhat immoderate interest in sexual matters, it is still a fairly successful, if rather abstruse, allegory; and it is in this way that most, if not all, the women mentioned in this diwān are better treated, as they usually carry a less obvious significance. ¹

Nature, like the fairer sex, retained several of its earlier romantic features in Unshūdat al-Maṭar, but also underwent a spectacular change. Although it continues to be idyllic, deprived of its more vicious features, and closer to God than the city and its society, as is implied in the following quote:

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¹ For another, shorter example see "Ughniya fi Shahr Āb", Diwān, 1, p. 328 ff.; or for commitment towards women in society see Ibid., p. 319.
it has taken on a more profound significance, which tends to be symbolic, obliquely expressing some viewpoint or some social comment. In this way Nature is no longer confined to being a backcloth for as-Sayyāb's emotions, but becomes a truly integral part of any poem, without which the whole poem would collapse. Moreover it is intimately bound up with all his ideals and hopes for the future, and especially for a political and social renaissance in Iraq:

1. Diwān, 1, p. 415.
2. Ibid., p. 392.
Thus it is being used as a symbol for universal fertility, be it physical or spiritual, and for all that is actually good and pure, or promises future benefits, but it also stands, negatively, for infertility, in all spheres of existence, as below:

Similarly, its less pleasant features are used to represent pain, anger, and frustration, as in "Tammūz Jaykūr", in which anemones and wheat symbolise future harvests, while the pig stands for their total destruction:

2. Ibid., p. 468.
3. Ibid., p. 410.
while, in the qasīda "Unshūdat al-Maṭar", the serpent personifies evil and corruption:

وفي العراق الفاتن تنشر الرخين
من زعارة يزدح النرات بالدرى

Yet, Nature is not used simply to symbolise social or political matters in this diwān, but continues to be a medium through which the poet can explicate his longings for his family and his longing for Jaykūr, as had been the case in his previous collection, Asāḥīr. For example, in "Marpā Ghaylān", as-Sayyāb tells us how his memories of Jaykūr can, temporarily, obliterate his surroundings in the metropolis, so that he believes himself to be once more at home, far from the harrassment of the city:

While we do not wish to study as-Sayyāb's symbolic use of Nature too precisely at this point, as it lies more suitably within the chapter on symbolism, we must emphasise that its role in his poetry, from 1950 onwards, was momentous, and cannot be separated from the

1. Diwān, 1, p. 481.
2. Ibid., p. 326.
most fundamental fibres of his style. Natural imagery became his principal vehicle of expression, and through it he discussed every single theme, whether it involved moral principles, as in "Madīna bi-lā Mātar", or subjective meditations, as in "an-Nahr wa-l-Kawt". In fact he built his natural imagery into a personal, symbolic framework, so that any reader wishing to enjoy his nature poetry to the full would be well-advised to discover the inherent significance of as-Sayyāb's pastoral diction -- the word "nakhil" should, for example, immediately signify fertility, renaissance or a refuge, whereas "mahār" normally implies beauty of hopes for a better future.

Nature was also linked to his nostalgia for his childhood or for his lost mother, and the contemplation of Nature often leads him to such thoughts, as in "Gharīb 'alā l-Khallī", in which it encourages him to remember his aunt, who used to sit at night telling stories to the children:

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{انتظرني ؟ انذكرني ؟} \\
\text{سعوا، كنا قائمين} \\
\text{بذك النفل الحزين} \\
\text{قدّم من شهد} \\
\text{هذين السلاطين} \\
\text{كنا نحولانه} \\
\text{كما مدارية الذي بينها كيانه.}
\end{align*}
\]

However, his nostalgia for the past now arose from real feelings of alienation, and has ceased to be a partly romantic pose, as as-Sayyāb

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2. This will be studied in depth in the chapter on as-Sayyāb's symbolism.
3. Dīwān, 1, p. 319.
now found himself away from home, in strange surroundings in Kuwait. In "Jaykūr wa-l-Madinah" he believed himself to be permanently expelled from his village by some unnatural force, which has fallen between himself and his family:

وَمَجَّكُورُ مِنْ غَلِّقِ الدُّورِ فِيهَا - وَجَاءَ ابنَ بَطَرِقٍ، الْبَابِ - دِونِهْ؟

وَمَا حُوَّلِ الْمُرْبِعُ عَنْهَا ... فَمَنْ حِيَثَ دَارُ اسْتِزْرَأَتُ الْيَهِيَ الْمُدِينَةِ؟

For as-Sayyāb Jaykūr had become a microcosm for the whole of Iraq, so that some of the desire to return to Jaykūr found in this collection is actually hope for the future of Iraq, as in "al-‘Awdā li-Jaykūr":

هَدِيْكُورُ، مَاضِيَّهِ عَادٌ

هَذَا صَيْحَةُ الْدِّيكِ ذَابَ الرَّقَادِ

وَرَعْتُ مِنْ حَمَايَةِ الأَكْبَرِ

الشَّمْسِ امَّ السَّنَبِ الَّذِينِ

خَلَفَ الْبَائِقِ، رَغْيِنَ.

and, similarly, the rebirth of Jaykūr signifies that of Iraq, for which as-Sayyāb would gladly lay down his life:

جَبَّوُرُ ... سَتَوَلُ جَبَّوُرُ;

الْنَّزَّرُ سَيُؤْرَقُ والْيَوْرُ

1. Dīwān, 1, p. 416.
In fact his feelings of loneliness and alienation were usually suppressed, and seldom encroached upon the more social or moral issues of this collection, so that they appear more often as despair for the future prosperity of Iraq.

While the bulk of the verse in this collection is devoted to social issues, especially those concerning the rebirth of the Arab world, and particularly of Iraq, it also includes several poems which linger upon personal matters, especially "an-Nahr wa-l-Mawt", in which he discusses his attitude towards death, his weakness and his loneliness, and his desire to die for some important cause. This is, deservedly, one of as-Sayyab's most famous qasidas, and is, also, one of his most successful poems, as regards his new use of imagery, which draws totally upon sympathetic reactions to the words, and hardly glances upon pictorial representation. The opening section is a perfect example of this:

"O O

أجراة بر ج ضاع في ترارة البوين
الماء في البر ج، والعروبة في الش جر.
وينفع البر ج، اجراة من المطر
يؤربها يوزب في أين.

1. Diwan, 1, p. 427 and p. 411 resp. For further details see chapter on symbolism.
As we can see, it is impossible to build a mental picture from this, as as-Sayyāb builds one short and vivid image upon another, yet we are left with a definite emotional response, which is one of sadness and passive despair. As-Sayyāb's imagery was now actually expressing emotion through suggestive diction and clever manipulation of rhythm and rhyme, and the same is true of as-Sayyāb's more political verse, and in "Unshūdat al-Māṭar", we find the same sort of imagery, in which simile and metaphor are part of the very texture of the qasīda, and cannot be separated from it in any way:

Furthermore, his committed poems dedicated to Iraq, such as "al-Masāh Ba'd as-Salb"; "Madrīnat as-Sindibād" and "Madīna bi-lā Māṭar".

1. Diwān, 1, p. 453. Buwayb is a small stream in Jaykār. For another example see Ibid., p. 317.
2. Ibid., p. 474.
3. Ibid., p. 457; p. 463; and p. 486 resp.
we are confronted with images which shock us into awareness; as in the penultimate qasida, in which the contemporary state of Iraq is described thus:

In this quote we again encounter as-Sayyāb's use of light and darkness described in the discussion of his previous diwan, and, indeed, there are innumerable examples of this in this collection also, portraying peace and war, freedom and oppression, fertility and barrenness, good and evil and life and death. The most simple, yet most effective example of such imagery is probably the closing lines of al-Asliha wa-l-Atfāl:

As we have seen, Unshūdat al-Mātur is a diwān of contrasts, in which justice battles with injustice, innocence with corruption, good with evil, freedom with oppression, and peace with life and war and death. Yet this effects neither the unity of his qasīdā, nor that of the collection as a whole. As-Sayyāb was at the peak of his creative

1. Diwān, 1, p. 470.
2. Ibid., p. 590-1.
genius, turning his hand as readily to political and social verse as to his subjective experiences, political or otherwise. In this collection he sought to exploit free verse to its limits, so that its wave-like structure could be harnessed to communicate his intention, by increasing, or decreasing, the number of tafā'īl in each line, or by varying the rhyme forms.

Similarly, he began to use symbols freely, employing them as an organic component in his verse, mostly under the influence of Sitwell and Eliot, although also under that of Jessie Weston's From Ritual to Romance and Frazer's The Golden Bough. The resulting verse was extremely individualistic, personal and, in spite of some disasters such as "Kin Ru'vā Fū Kāy"¹, is predominately successful.

Certain elements normally dubbed as romantic are still discernible in Unshūdat al-Matar², but they are now more sincerely romantic, as they find their roots deep within as-Sayyāb, who was, probably, unaware of their continued existence, as he strove to relate the struggles of his era in verse. As-Sayyāb's understanding of critical theories was often somewhat lacking in depth, and it is typical that he should have claimed that free verse, and thus this diwān, was "a new technical structure, a new realist trend that came to crush romantic limpness, and the literature of ivory towers."³ Certainly, he crushed the limp, negative romanticism of most of modern Arabic romantic verse, and was

1. Diwān, 1, p. 355.
2. Such as the idealisation of woman and Nature, nostalgia for the past, and especially for childhood, the idealisation of children (see especially, al-Asliha wa-l-Atfāl), and feelings of alienation.
writing new, realistic and dedicated verse, but, in equating romanticism with the literature of ivory towers, he failed to appreciate the true nature of romanticism.

Romanticism is, in its essence, the sincere expression of the convictions, experiences and ideals of an individual, concerning his life, that of his nation, or of mankind generally, and as-Sayyāb was, unquestionably, doing just this in Unshūdat al-Maṭar. Seen this way realism and commitment are not necessarily diametrically opposed to romanticism, because the true romantic is in fact a man of conscience and conviction, and, as F. W. Bateson so accurately discerned, to "be a Realist you must first have been a Romantic; to be a good Realist you must still be a Romantic — a little disillusioned no doubt, preferably a little embittered, but a Romantic at heart."¹

After Unshūdat al-Maṭar as-Sayyāb turned away from social issues, and, for the most part, concentrated upon subjective themes, such as his changing attitude towards his impending death, nostalgia for the preferable and more healthy days of the past, and a sincere and deep longing for Iraq and his family, from which he was separated for the greater part of the last few years of his life, as he moved from hospital to hospital, hoping for a cure.²

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2. It would seem better to treat the last three volumes published during his lifetime as a single unit, as the differences tend to be due to changing viewpoints, rather than actual stylistic differences. These are, of course, al-Ma'bad al-Gharīq (1962), Mansil al-Aqmān (1963), and Shanāshil Ibtat al-Chalabi (1964); it also includes Ighāl (1965), published posthumously.
However, there is, at least one common factor running through all these subjects, and that is his past loves and lovers. Indeed women regain the prominent thematic position which they had held in *Ashār wa-Asātīr*, but as-Sayyāb's treatment of the subject has changed subtly, as his lovers are increasingly identified with his past generally, so that it is sometimes difficult to judge whether his subject is really a woman, or if she is simply a symbol for his childhood, or for Iraq; as in "Hanīfī Rūmā", in which he discusses his longing for Iraq, combining it with his longing for his beloved, which, he feels, amounts to one and the same thing:

Yet, the bulk of his poetry concerns his hopes for love, and how they have been dampened by past affairs and disillusionments. As we shall see, it is not until the last few months of his life that as-Sayyāb really began to appreciate the love and fidelity of his wife, Iqbāl, and, until this time, we find him complaining that he would not look to past relationships if his present beloved fulfilled his needs:

although he recognises the shortcomings inherent in his affairs:

In al-Ma'bad al-Gharic it is again to his dead cousin, Wafīqa, for whom he waited through the years, that as-Sayyāb returns:

as she was, according to him his closest friend, whose passing had left him alone in the world:

The poem "al-Ghayma al-Ghariba", also concerns Waffqa, but in it he talks of how cruelly his love was rejected; however it soon becomes clear that he is not actually blaming her, but is rather giving vent to his feelings of frustration at her loss:

The futility of life without love is an idea that occurs again and again in as-Sayyab's later works, but it is particularly well expressed in the poem "Dhahabti", in which he announces that day itself became impossible after her departure, because she had taken its spendour with her when she left:

But his feelings of bereavement and loneliness are not always so passively expressed, and as-Sayyab was practically obsessed by what he believed to be the bad treatment received at the hands of the women he

1. Diwan, 1, p. 142.
2. Ibid., p. 168.
loved, so contrary to his own fidelity. In "Ya Nahr", he chides one childhood sweetheart, Hāla, for her failure to fulfil her promise, in rather sombre imagery:

while in "Ahibbīnī" he tells how all those whom he loved never loved him, although he worshipped them:

As before as-Sayyāb tended to see women as temptresses, as he says in "ash-Shā'īr ar-Raḥīm", which, although dedicated to Charles Baudelaire, tells us more about as-Sayyāb than the illustrious French poet. Firstly he dwells, at length, upon women's most despicable features in striking and venomous imagery:

but goes on, typically, to describe her more sensuous aspects:

1. Diwān, 1, p. 172.
2. Ibid., p. 640.
and how, according to him Baudelaire saw through their wiles and
turned them upon women themselves:

Clearly, from these extracts, as-Sayyāb's interest in the affairs of
the flesh had not diminished with the onset of his debility, but had
rather increased. There are, in fact, many indications of this in
his later diwān, such as the poem "Ihtiraq", in which he calls on
his beloved in extremely sensual terms begging her to come to him and
melt his whole being, thus returning him to life:

From the previous paragraphs it is quite clear that the women in
as-Sayyāb's verse continued to be stereotypes, even if given the names
of erstwhile loves, and only Iqbal escaped this, although not totally.
Slowly, but surely, as-Sayyāb began to perceive his situation more

1. Diwān, 1, p. 191 ff.
2. Ibid., p. 211. For other examples, see Ibid., p. 678 ff. and
   p. 647 ff.
clearly, so that Iqbal begins to appear more and more regularly as he calls her to look after Ghaylan, his son, and begs her to stay close to him:

As-Sayyab was now beginning to feel that there was a mutual sympathy between himself and his wife, a belief that was to increase as time passed, so that we often find him addressing her, lamenting her present circumstances, and praising her fidelity, while recognising how much he has underestimated her worth and her beauty. In a poem written in 1962 he bewails his past treatment of her, and the fact that it is too late for any recompense:

while in one composed a year later he asks:

ﻚﻴﻦ ﺍﻀﻴﺎﻌﺘك ﻓﻲ ﺰﺤﻤﻪ ﺑﺎي ﺍﻟﻄﺮﻴﻠﻪ؟

feeling that it is too late to show his love, because the poet has died within him, before his own death:

ما ﺑﺖ ﺍﻟﻤﺸﺎﻋر

في واشنطت كوى الاحرم.

أه يا جميله!

He continually longs for her, and often calls her to his side in his verse, begging her to comfort him in his pain and loneliness, and telling her not to lose hope for he shall return to her:

إيه إقبال لا تتأسسي من رجوع

هاتنا قبل أن أفرع الباب ....

......

قبلني على جهته سكنها الموت صنكة أليما

هدي في عيون سهوان الردى والمغاد.

For it is indeed Iqbāl that encourages his continued fight against death:

ويا إقبال يا إقبال، يا عيني من الغيمر،

and inspires him to verse:

2. Ibid., p. 262.
remaining faithful to him, whereas all other women had failed:

With the exception of one poem, which was written in anger and deleted by as-Sayyāb himself from the manuscript of Shanāšīl Ibnat al-Chalabi\(^3\), he longed for his wife’s company, and knew that she awaited his safe return, and burnt a lamp every night, in case he arrived without warning:

But he is a realist as regards their relationship, and is quite aware that there has been both sorrow and joy:

and that, sometimes, there must be a little hypocrisy in love:

Iqbal has, thus, become the real love of his life, his refuge and, even, his life-giving force, yet his attitude towards her is not one of romantic idealisation, because, as we have seen, he recognised the need for compromise in their relationship. However, he weeps for her, recognising that she must live on, when all his sorrows are past:

But several of his statements concerning women in these diwâns manifest blatant romantic worshipping of women. In one poem, for example, he describes how the life went out of his life when his beloved left him:

---

1. Diwân, 1, p. 662.
2. Ibid., p. 650.
3. Ibid., p. 719. It is possible that these were the last lines of poetry written by as-Sayyâb.
and, in another poem says women are a refuge from the world, and from pain:

although it should be pointed out that such a refuge is, for him, usually seen in the personage of his mother:

Similarly he still believed love to be the union of two souls:

2. Ibid., p. 235.
3. Ibid., p. 609.
4. Ibid., p. 661.
a spring, not a well, because love gives as it receives:

الحب هو شلال، لا نافورة،
كانت إذا برزق لا كالماء،
كانت تطوى غول السما،
لكن شرر الزمان.

Thus, as-Sayyāb's attitude towards love and his beloveds became a curious mixture during the last few years of his life, combining disillusionment, with past loves, with praise for Iqṭāl, realism with the romantic adoration of the female of the species, and sensuality with spiritual love, which can even surpass the joys of the flesh. It would appear that as-Sayyāb had, at last, discovered that the love, for which he had been searching so ardently, had been beside him all the time, in the person of his wife, in whom both sensuality and spirituality were finally reconciled.

One of the themes most often connected with love in his last four volumes was Nature, as displayed by the following quotation:

و كُل شبابها كان انتظاراً، في ملي شديد، موثقة فجر
و تُنفس في جسمة الطيب، ريش تغاصها المطر
فبينها نجارة تملأ اللسان بالأصواء، ناية.

because Nature was, like the fair sex, a continual source of inspiration for as-Sayyāb:

1. Dīwān, 1, p. 141.
2. Ibid., p. 641; for further examples see p. 611-3, p. 663, p. 707, p. 720, etc.
For as-Sayyāb Nature was Jaykūr and vice-versa, and the latter is practically always described in pastoral terms:

جَبَلُ جَيْكُورُ صَنِّدَ غَيْشَاءُ الصَّلَائِمَةَ والزُّهْرَتُ،
سَيِّدٌ بَابٌ امْكَانٍ لِّلذِّنَّاسِ.
وَالنَّفْقُ مِنْ عَذَابٍ النَّارِ بِالنَّحْرِ.
ذَلِكُمُ اللَّهُ وَاللَّهُ يُحْلِفُ الْحَمِيْدُ.

and, indeed, as a paradise:

هَيَاتُ اِلَّيْها جَبَلُ جَيْكُورُ
بَيْنَ الصَّبَّابَى نِيَّاتِ وَصَاعَتُ حَينَ ضَاعًا.

in which God is revealed, because he created it:

هلَّ أَنَّ جَبَلُ جَيْكُورُ كَانَ قَبْلَ جَبَلُ جَيْكُورُ
فِي عَاطِرِ اللَّهِ ... فِي ضَعُفِ النُّورِ؟

just as he created man:

وَأَبَسِرَ اللَّهُ عَلَى هَيَيَةٍ نَّفْلَةٍ، كَتَابَ نَفْلَةٍ يَبْيَضُ
فِي الطَّلَالِ،
اَمْسُهُ يَتَوْلَى ذَا بَيْتٍ، يَغْلاَم،
وَهَبُّهُ الهِيَانَ وَالنَّدَا.

1. Diwān, 1, p. 207–8.
2. Ibid., p. 188–189; p. 657; and p. 188 resp.
3. Ibid., p. 147.
Furthermore, he began to use Nature to explicate his belief in the continuity of existence, and in renewal through death, as in "Safar Ayyāb", when he cries:

\[
\text{فَابَرَقَّ وَارِدَيْ وَأَرْسَلَى المَطْرَ}
\]
\[
\text{وَمَزَقَّ دُوَّابَ الشَّجَرَ}
\]
\[
\text{وَأَرْعَقَ السَّهْرُ}
\]
\[
\text{وَأَرْهَقَ النَّمَرَ}
\]
\[
\text{سَتَرِهْنَ بَعْدَ السَّيْنَاءِ النَّطَالَ بَالْحَبْوُب}
\]

just as he used it to express his attitude towards death:

\[
\text{تَعْبِتْ مِنْ نُبُوَّةِ الْأَخِيرَ}
\]
\[
\text{أَرْاءَ فِي النَّجَاعَ وَالْدِّعاَ وَالْمُوْرَدَ،}
\]
\[
\text{أَرِاءَ فِي كُلِّ رَبِيعٍ بَيْنَ الْمَدُودَ}
\]

and his desire to slip quietly away, according to the laws of Nature:

\[
\text{اهْمِسَ إِنِّي أَذَوَّبُ، أَتَعْبُ أَنْعَمُ}
\]
\[
\text{إِهْوَتْ كَالْشَّجَرَ}
\]

In fact as-Sayyāb extended its scope so that it covered every aspect of his experiences:

---

1. Diwān, 1, p. 274-5.
2. Ibid., p. 137; and p. 148 resp.
and, as in all his collections, continued to use natural imagery to set the atmosphere, appropriate to any particular poem:

while employing animal imagery to depict states:

and especially pain and death:

1. *Dīwān*, 1, p. 251. The word in brackets appears earlier in the poem.
Only when discussing the great metropolis does as-Sayyāb's great talent for natural imagery desert him, as had been the case in his previous volumes, otherwise Nature is still one of the most prominent features of his verse, although it is never autonomous, being always bound up with some other theme. While Nature was still coupled with the rebirth of Iraq, as in "Qasīda ilā l-'Irāq ath-Thā'ir":

سيزرب ما معبوء من مال عمر حاليلد
لعود ما، منه تطلع كل ساقته، يُعيد
التآ، النبئ إلى القصص الباسات فتستعيد
ما لص ما، في الشتاء النامسي.

it was more often joined with subjective themes, such as nostalgia for his childhood in Jaykūr, and Wafiqa:

نبت الاستياء، في أعمالها ذكرى طويلة
لمشيئ بين اوراق الالهة
فيه من بياضاته الزرق، إنقاد أخضُر

As we might have expected, nostalgia for the days of his youth overtook as-Sayyāb towards the end of his life, and his childhood especially often appears to have been idyllic, as in "Shanāshīl Ibnat al-Chalabī":

واذكر من شتات، الفرية، النضاع فيه النور
من خل السيب، كأنه النَّمَم.

1. Diwān, 1, p. 309.
2. Ibid., p. 128.
but he also remembers the pain which he endured, even as a child and youth:

As is so often the case, Wafīqa reminds him of his childhood and of its customs so that, for example, he longs to stand beneath her window, as he had done so often in the past:

Nor is it strange to find as-Sayyāb dreaming of a simple life close to Nature, which would give him all he desires from life:

1. Dīnār, 1, p. 597.
2. Ibid., p. 626.
3. Ibid., p. 122.
Such longings were, of course, engendered by the illness which prevented him from enjoying so many things, notably the pleasures of family life, while also presenting him with the unedifying prospect of an early death, which was continually on his mind, and, consequently, in his verse. His feeling towards death tended to change according to his health, his mood and his environment, but there is a noticeable progression in the verse written during the last four years of his life. As we saw in "an-Nahr wa-l-Mawt", as-Sayyāb felt impotent against death, frustrated at the thought of dying in bed from weakness, rather than in the midst of the battle against tyranny and corruption. But this determination has begun to pale in al-‘Abd al-Chariq, although he could still attack God for his cruelty towards men in "Amāna Bāb Allāh" and end the poem with the compelling lines:

منظرماً اهيج اميش الهبار
"اربي ان أموت يا إلهي!

Suffering from his slow paralysis, as-Sayyāb used to lie awake at night contemplating his situation, and the future, as far as one existed. The fight against illness weighed heavily upon him, and, in the same poem, we find him longing to slip peacefully into death, and end the tiring confrontations:

2. Ibid., p. 453.
3. Ibid., p. 176 and p. 135 resp. The former is dated Basra, 17/2/62; the latter 26/8/61.
Such contemplations upon death led him to extend his horizons to the death of all men, who as part of God's creation, are all subject to His will:

اذا السواه عند مطرقة الآجال من حربة

while also leading him to consider life and death as part of the same existence:

ام صيحة تبد الردى بالرموح

1. Diwān, 1, p. 136-137.
2. Ibid., p. 215.
In his next diwan, *Manzil al-Aqanān*, death is seen as a return to the forefathers, and, more especially, to his mother:

But not all the poems concerned with death in this diwan demonstrate the same passive acceptance, and sometimes his meditations take on a sombre quality. In "Safar Ayyūb", for example, death is likened to a bird of prey, stooping over a sparrow:

Indeed, as death came closer, as-Sayyūb resumed his battle, and, although he is never persuaded that the victory will be his, gives the impression that it is he, and not death, who will choose:

2. Ibid., p. 271.
and announces that his poetry is his sword, until the very end:

As-Sayyāb did not want to die far from his beloved Basra, even if this meant a continuation of his suffering:

although he longed for peace, albeit the peace of death. How often we find him begging God to bring near his death, claiming that even the most violent death would be preferable to his present circumstances:

1. Diwān, 1, p. 289.
2. Ibid., p. 272.
3. Ibid., p. 261.
4. Ibid., p. 706.
In fact this wish for death finally became a passionate desire, as we can see in "‘Ukkāz ff 1-Jahīm", in which he craves God's indulgence, so that he can suffer even the torments of the Fire, and so escape the present pain and restraint:

But there are times when he recognises that he must be patient and await death, the enemy against which he is powerless:

and admits that he no longer wishes to resist it, because he has exhausted all his resources:

As-Sayyāb finally felt that he could oppose Fate no longer, and consoled himself with the thought that death is not final, and is, in fact, the beginning of a new life:

1. Diwān, 1, p. 693.
2. Ibid., p. 677.
3. Ibid., p. 644.
while something of him will continue to live in his son, Ghaylān, just as his grandfather tells his grandchildren in "Iram Dhāt al-‘Imād":

سون أراها فيكم نائم الأرجب
بعد ذبول زهرقٍ

From the above extracts it is clear that as-Sayyāb, while concentrating his poetic efforts on more personal themes, retained the style so magnificently developed in Unshūdat al-Maqṣar. Indeed there are many fine examples of masterful description amongst these poems, written in the last few years of his life, like the opening lines of "Manzil al-Aqūnān", which convey the impressions of a deserted house perfectly:

1. Diwān, 1, p. 697.
2. Ibid., p. 607. The last six quotations are from Shanashīl Ibtat al-Chalabi and Iqbal.
3. Ibid., p. 277.
While the imagery of this quote is still based on associations, and on precise diction, it has recovered some of the pictorial power discernible in his juvenilia and *Azhār Dhābila*. However, another example, "*Khalā l-Bayt*", in which another empty house is portrayed, is fundamentally based on emotive ideas, rather than on visual images:

The latter is, of course, not intended merely as a descriptive section, reproducing the old, vacant building in words, but is, rather, like the complete poem, a conceit for as-Sayyāb's own feelings of despair, and for his ruined body. Death, as we have seen, now occupied the poet a great deal, and it is hardly surprising to discover that some of his best imagery centres around it, and sometimes shocks us with its impact:

Just as the idea of his eyes and mouth partaking substance from darkness reminds us of his slow death, which, he felt, drew its strength from the surrounding darkness, the following lines from "Anma Bāb Allāh" communicate his feelings of fear and frustration to us:

Similarly as-Sayyāb was now creating some of his best examples of personification, the most effective of which is probably from the opening section of "Fi Layālī s-Siḥād", in which light seems to creep around the door, afraid of what it is going to see:

\[
\text{كما ينزل نور هائل من فُرِحَةُ الباباَر} \\
\text{الظلماء في غُرُفِهَا.}
\]

2. Ibid., p. 138.
3. Ibid., p. 618.
On other occasions images of light are coupled with those of darkness, sometimes with spectacular results:

واعيناً كلما زرع الغروب موالاة الدُّيَّور
بِناجها الصبايا سَهَّلَ من صندقها الشُّئْن
على الأفق البعيد لعل مفتتاً من شراع أو سناء مصباح
على اللَّيْح الضْرَّوري لأخ

But it is darkness which increasingly pervades his poems during these years of frenetic poetic activity, whether as a tyrant, as in "Javkūr Shābat":

ما الدُّكَوَّانَك المقشرات الصبيحة
يحسن الظل فيها نقيبة؟

or as a harbinger of despair and alienation, as in section four of "Safar Ayyūb":

ما أرَبَّ عِينَيْنِ تَدِ اعتباً به الواز
في غزيم دوناً مال ولا سكن،
يمرُوك في الأَجْنَّة
يمرُون في ظِلَّمَات الموت: أَعْيَانُ
ناد الفَوَّاد بِنارهِنا اذهتنا

1. Diwān, 1, p. 688.
2. Ibid., p. 206.
3. Ibid., p. 257.
In conclusion, we can see that as-Sayyāb continued on the trail blazed by him in Unshūdat al-Mātar, but tended, practically totally, towards subjective themes, although he did not dissociate himself completely from his commitment to society and to the Arab cause. Some critics, like Ḥasan Tawfīq, saw Unshūdat al-Mātar as realistic, and called his subsequent collections "a return to romanticism and its prediliction for total subjectivity." But, as we have seen, this is hardly true as it involved a view of Romanticism which is restricted to content, and fails to consider the literary criteria for romanticism, which are based upon the tendency to see the individual, and so the artist, as the pivot of the Universe, so that the most important aspect of Existence becomes his attitudes towards, and his relationship with Creation and his fellow men. Similarly, other critics do not wish to stigmatise as-Sayyāb with the term "romantic" after the period covered by Ashūr wa-Asāfīr. To this end Boullata claims, in one article, that the "remembrance of past experience played a major part in these poems [i.e. those written in the last three years of his life], to balance the lack of active living. But it is not a romantic remembrance and yearning for a return to childhood or youth. It is rather a display of life as a succession of irretrievable sensations." Here again we find the term "romantic" used in the limited pejorative sense, normally applied to literatures or ideals that are

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1. For examples, see Diwān, l, p. 197 ("Ibn Shahīd"); p. 238 ("Rabil al-Jazā'ir"); and p.628 ("Layla fi l-'Iraq").
unrealistic, nostalgic and idyllic. In fact there are indications that as-Sayyāb did, sometimes, seek to escape into the past, away from the trials of the present:

"تقبت ما تصنع الحياة
أعيش بالأمس، وأدعو أمسى الغذا"

but this is, nevertheless, by no means unrealistic, because he himself recognised the futility of living in the past, and also remembered its frustration and pain, especially as far as his relationships with women are concerned.

While certain features of as-Sayyāb's verse mature steadily throughout his career, such as his imagery, allusions, allegories, and his tendency to fill his verse with artistically successful contrasts, some aspects, like his use of symbols, reached a peak in Unshūdat al-Matar, and then, although still employed, retreated to a less obvious position. Throughout his life, as-Sayyāb's saving graces were his careful diction and powerful imagery, which often conceal structural weaknesses, such as his tendency to extend a metaphor beyond its limits, or to carry a parenthetical phrase beyond its proper scope. As-Sayyāb was, fundamentally, an impulsive poet, who depended practically entirely upon psychological association, and a continual and instinctive supply of ideas and appropriate images, which drew their clarity and impact from his delicate sensitivity towards the precise sound and meaning of

2. For examples, see Ibid., p. 623; p. 272; p. 220; p. 688; p. 117; p. 219, etc.
every individual word. The results of this process are often extremely effective, and we find a section leading to a startling image, which is followed by a change in mood, often on a quieter tone, which, in turn, leads to another vivid metaphor or simile. Perhaps one of the most striking examples of this is the poem "Hamīd", and especially the first fourteen lines:

However, one feature is constant from his earliest poems until his last qaṣīda, and that is his expressive sincerity. It is true that as-Sayyāb set up postures in his early verse, as in "Aqdāh wa-Ahlām" in which he obviously copied Ṭāḥā, and wrote "al-Umm wa-t-Tīfla ad-Dā'ī'a", in which he obviously copied Ṭāḥā, and wrote "al-Umm wa-t-Tīfla ad-Dā'ī'a", in which

When clearly under the influence of Wordsworth’s *The Lyrical Ballads*, while *al-Wasiyya* ends on a note which is suspiciously reminiscent of Eliot’s opening lines in *Ash-Wednesday*. But these are rare cases, and the bulk of as-Sayyāb’s verse wells up from deep within his heart and his conscience, whether he is discussing the social problems of Iraq, as in *Unshudat al-Matar*, his disillusionment in love, as in *Azhār wa-Asāfīr*, or his fight against death, as in his later volumes.

It is this that made as-Sayyāb a true romantic, while his treatment of, and love for, Nature, his nostalgia for past experiences, and his feelings of alienation, directly or obliquely stated, fall within the sphere of the semi-negative romanticism of modern Arabic verse, and can even be detected in his more political verse of the 1950s.

In this way Nature is seldom used to portray evil and corruption, but is involved in what is good and promises prosperity, with reminiscences of the past and the halcyon days of youth, or is a refuge to which his protagonist can return when the cares of the world threaten to crush him. Similarly childhood should be pleasant, according to his verse, even if reality is quite different because of the self-interest and cruelty of mankind, just as woman should be a beautiful and adored refuge for her lover, inspiring him to verse and great acts, although, again, the true facts may differ drastically, as in *al-Mumis al-‘Amyā*.

However, as previously stated, romanticism is also possessed of positive virtues, ensconced in an individualistic world view, and

1. See *Dwān*, 1, p. 5; p. 153; and p. 222 resp.. See also Eliot, p. 89.
as-Sayyāb undoubtedly possessed just such an outlook. This is less obvious in the earlier stage of his career with its tendency to copy other poets who happened to be predominantly romantic, but he then developed a more personal style which, although particularly influenced by Sitwell and Eliot, was fundamentally his own, and exhibited a commitment towards humanistic ideals, which could only be those of a man with personal Universal views and a private conscience. It is true to say that some poems are rather immature stylistically at this time, such as "Min Ru' yā Fū Kār" and al-Asliha wa-l-Atfāl, but even these nasā'id do not bow to the ideas of any particular political party or section of society, but are rather interpretations of his own feelings and beliefs. Towards the end of his life he reverted, more or less, to his original themes, although he treated them in a more realistic and less artificial manner, while still employing the style of the above-mentioned medial stage, but here he continued to use his own experiences and emotions, expressing them according to his own literary style and his own vision of them.

Thus, it can be claimed that as-Sayyāb's career contained three different romantic phases:

i) The imitative: which would extend into Asāfīr, although it could not be applied to all the poems in this diwān, and would cover his Bawākīr and his first collection, Azhār Dhābila.

ii) The personal humanistic: which would cover part of Asāfīr, extend into Unshūdat al-Matār and the committed verse of the 1950s, and linger slightly into the later volumes.

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iii) The subjective: which would cover poems like "an-Nahr wa-l-Mawt" in Unshûdat al-Mâtr, and, obviously, the poems of his subsequent verse, written until the time of his death in 1964.

In this way we can understand how as-Sayyâb appears, at first glance, to have deserted romanticism for a period of his career and then reverted to it. Actually he turned his back not upon romanticism, but upon its negative aspects, replacing them with positive forces and motivations more in keeping with the ideals of the great thinking romantics of the European tradition. Thus, even the verse of his final stage, which, as we have seen, contained some of the negative aspects of his early romantic verse, is no longer totally negative, in spite of the numerous factors which, naturally, contributed to such an attitude, such as his illness and his poverty; it is a positive expression of his fight against death and incredible odds, to live his life according to his ideals, and to communicate this struggle to his readers through his verse.

If we are to believe the criteria set forth by Eliot in his essay "Tradition and the Individual talent"¹, which are that a great poet should start his career by studying the great masters, and, thereafter, produce literature which, while drawing on the desirable features of these masterpieces, is very much his own creation, then there can be doubt that as-Sayyâb was indeed a great poet, and, in accordance with F. W. Bateson's superficially contradictory statement about the "Realist" and the "Romantic", a romantic through and through.²

Finally, no discussion of as-Sayyāb's romanticism would be complete without a survey of his attitude towards poetry and the poet, although any critic undertaking such a study must always remember that as-Sayyāb's critical statements and writings, like those of Wordsworth, whom he respected greatly, often lack the clarity and precision of his poetry, and were often written in response to attacks.

The poet, when encountered in as-Sayyāb's verse, is normally that of the romantic genre, suffering and scribbling in the gloom, composing only at night:

شامب الضوء يرقص الشاعر السيران تكييه نائات الغرام
فائق مثل قلبها مين يغلي
أعلى لهنجة الصح وَغُدُود

رمى ابي السراج بين اضقيت آهاته وراء الظلم
لد tasarه إنه شارم ضل بنيا الخيال والاوهام

آذن الصبح أن يلَح فريته يسمع الطرف لحظة بناام

a prisoner of his craft, compelled by some inner power:

وارتز بريتها بآياته
فطافبيري حول أبياته

1. Dīwān, 2, p. 100-1 (dated 7/2/44). For another example see Ibid., p. 169.
2. Ibid., p. 159 (dated 21/4/44).
This attitude did not change noticeably throughout his life, so that even poems in his last collection describe the poet writing verse at night, inspired by his own experiences of life, and especially by his relationships with the fair sex:

وَثَلَّكَ،َ وَثُلُّكَ شَاعِرًا،َ الَّذِي كَانَ لِي اِتِّجَاهًا وَكِفَائَةً،
شَرْبَتِ الشَّعْرَ مِنْ أَهْدَافِهَا وَنَخْسَتَ فِي أَفْيَاءٍ
تَسَلُّحُها قُصْائِدُهَا عَلَٰٓيّ... ... ... ... 1

even if they, like the daughters of the jinn, seek to lead the poor poet astray:

شَنْعُورُنَا بِلَّلَّهَا الْمَلَائِمُ،
وِبِرَاشْفِ النَّمْر،
مِنْهَا الْيَدِ أنْ يُتِبِّلِ السَّحْرَةِ
نِزْكَتُهَا فِي النَّغْمٍ
نَعْمَلُ كُلَّ شَاعَرٍ
رَكَبْنَا عَلَٰيّ ؟ 2

Yet the poet should not be totally introverted because he is part of Existence, and should, in accordance with as-Sayyāb's claim that any poet "sincere in his expression of life in every respect . . . will necessarily give expression to society's woes and hopes without being forced to do so by anyone" 3, communicate emotions with more general application:

From this it is clear that, as we might have expected, poetry was magical and eternal for as-Sayyāb, so the poet should not complain against the people of his era, because it is, in fact, they who will give him immortality, as he expresses their feelings and ideals:

Indeed, according to as-Sayyāb, no true poet can escape involvement in the problems and joys of mankind, because he is a part thereof, and must, therefore, reproduce man's struggle for survival against evil in his verse:

For the poet must portray the obvious battle between evil and man, which has continued down to the present time: but I would like to make it clear that it is important that the adḥb, when he portrays this battle, should not take up an escapist and neutral position, because he is a man before all else, and the problem in question is therefore his problem, and the battlefield his battlefield. In this way literature continues to

1. Diwān, 2, p. 159-60.
be one of man's weapons, and with it he can slash a path towards the best way of life.¹

Furthermore, for as-Sayyāb, purely introverted verse is but a tool of colonialism, but any verse totally devoted to a particular political or social ideology is equally spurious, because it is:

... one of the results of a gap between a poet and the society in which he is living; and his taking sides is [only] profitable for the authorities ... because the poet who has failed to understand the life of his community deeply, can hardly give vent to its feelings ...²

Literature, in any form, should be committed (multazam), but it should be motivated by the soul of the poet, who is himself part of society, and should not be written according to the dictates of a particular section thereof³, because such literature "is often without artistic merit and devoid of any true meaning or commitment."⁴ However, as-Sayyāb was not quite certain if literature belonged primarily to the community or to mankind generally. As is obvious from the previous quotations, he felt that literature should reflect the tribulations and aspirations of mankind, but he also believed that the poet or

1. Quoted from the lecture "Wasā'il at-Ta'rīf bi-l-Adab al-'Arabī" of as-Sayyāb, al-Ādāb (1956), p. 22.
3. See Rasā'il, p. 59 and p. 80 resp..
4. See Introduction to Wasā'il, p. 22.
author should be principally concerned with his own society, and only from there extend his horizons to embrace mankind generally.

One thing as-Sayyāb was sure about was that literature should be a continually changing and progressive experiment, and felt that his era was one of intense literary experimentation. There can be no doubt that the poets of the late 1940s were experimenting, as they sought to

express [their attitudes towards] the revolution
[which was taking place], in a style which was equally revolutionary, but not totally divided from the past; because the recognised that they drew their strength from their culture, and that they, were they to cut themselves off from this culture, would perish, just as a tree perishes when its roots are removed from the soil.¹

In this way some future poet would improve their endeavours and write masterful poetry², as has been the case in every era and in every community, because "truly progressive literature is that which expresses the powerful ideas developing in its particular society."³ However such literature can only evolve from literary rebellion, and "every mature revolution must start with [a change in] content before [any change] in

1. Alif Bā’, no. 431 (22/12/76), from a previously unpublished interview with as-Sayyāb, p. 34. For the need for cultural continuity see also al-Baṣri, p. 86.
2. Diwān, 1, Introduction, p. 6
form, because form is subservient to content and it is from new subject matter that new forms are sought."¹ This is, of course, contrary to as-Sayyāb's own experience as his qaṣīda "Hal Kāna Ḥubban" was composed within the negative genre of modern Arab romanticism, and many of those who copied this new "free verse", did so within the same genre. But as-Sayyāb did not despair of progress in this sphere to more meaningful poetry, because he felt sure that Arab poets would rise to the occasion, albeit belatedly.

For as-Sayyāb "art is a religion and, as such, has an existence of its own, and should not be a mere instrument in the poet's hand, but should be part of his life, and reflect his experiences in the most attractive and most emotive forms possible."² To this end the poet should assimilate what is best from all cultures, while retaining both his own cultural identity and that of his literature.³ As-Sayyāb wanted to give Arabic literature the world prestige which he felt it deserved⁴, but felt that it was not necessary to adhere to the norms of classical poetry to do so, although these could be employed when the artistic presentation necessitated it.

In his introduction to his diwān, Asāṭīr, as-Sayyāb explained how his metrical innovations (ash-shiʿr al-hurr) had grown out of a desire for precise expression, and from his association with English literature, and goes on to show how the bayt should only be the structural unit of any poem when content demands it, otherwise the meaning should be carried over from bayt to bayt for as long as the poet feels necessary,

1. al-Baṣrī, p. 86.
so that the poem itself becomes the basic organic unit and is not simply the total of its parts. As-Sayyāb feared greatly that these structural changes in Arabic poetry were not, in fact, the result of his "mature revolution", and were being pursued as an end in themselves and that this would eventually prove disastrous for modern verse, fears which finally proved groundless, although many poets have continued to express the same hackneyed ideals of the previous eras in modern free verse.

To conclude, it is clear from this cursory study of as-Sayyāb's attitude towards literature, that is is, according to him, continually changing, and developing within its own culture, which it should always maintain, while adopting any improvements from other cultures which prove coherent with its own intrinsic nature. In this way, literature becomes eternal, but not static, because the norms and philosophies of one era are not necessarily those of another, and literature should move with these transformations and developments, so that it is always relevant to its time and place, while also maintaining the timeless aspects of its existence; thus reflecting the joys and problems of life which, while applying to its own period, are also common to mankind in all countries and in every era.

Thus, as-Sayyāb remained true to romantic theories of literature, and similarly his attitude towards the artist himself exhibits certain facets of truly romantic ideals. Literature was, for him, the artist's individual expression of his experiences and emotions, both in the

1. See Introduction to Asāfīr, p. 6-8; and al-Bāṣrī, p. 88.
personal and the social sphere. But this expression should not be
confined to the ideals of a particular section of society, because
any feelings of neutrality towards, or separation from, society as a
whole necessarily renders his compositions incomplete and, at the
worst, meaningless as far as true poetry is concerned.

Such theories clearly place the poet at the centre of his art,
making his attitudes and expression the only valid measure for his
artistic compositions, an ideal which is purely romantic, and is con-
solidated in as-Sayyāb's case by his own poetry, which, whether intro-
verted or extroverted, personal, social or humanistic, always grows
from his own subjective attitude towards experience and the Universe,
while portraying the struggle of his nation or of mankind generally.¹

As-Sayyāb had left behind the fixed, negative romanticism of
Arabic verse in the late 1940s, and had entered the great romantic
traditions of the world, which have produced so many great poets,
whose creative genius rings with passionate convictions, so different
from the jaded scepticism and artificiality of the imitators who follow
in their wake. To every era its literary expression, and as-Sayyāb
was, unquestionably, a poet who recreated both his personal timeless
experiences and those of his generation in verse, and shall no doubt
reap the praise of those still to come.

¹. For example the poems of Unshūdat al-Maṭar either centre upon
national problems, like the qasida of the same name (Diwān, 1,
p. 474); Arab problems, like al-Mūmis al-'Amyā' (p. 509); human
and international problems, such as the atom bomb, like "Min Ru'yā
Fā Khāv (p. 355), or the arms race, like al-Asliha wa-l-Atfāl
(p. 563); or personal problems like "an-Nahr wa-l-Māwī (p. 453).
CHAPTER IV

Symbolism and the Problems of Definition

As one might have expected an exact and clearly defined explanation of the term "symbolism" proves even more difficult to arrive at than that of "romanticism" set out in Chapter II. Indeed one cannot help but sympathise with Wimsatt and Brooks when they announce, "One might be forgiven for coming to doubt whether the term 'symbolism' has any specific meaning at all, and to conclude that it is, like the term 'romanticism', simply the name for a bundle of tendencies, not all of them very closely related." However, as Bowra pointed out in his book The Heritage of Symbolism, the term can be properly applied to a group of French poets writing in the last half of the nineteenth century, who agreed on several principles and shared a common view of life, and who influenced various other European literatures at the turn of the century.

In fact traces of symbolism had existed throughout the history of literature whenever one object was substituted for another, but these tended to be allegories or conceits rather than symbols in the specialised sense which we shall find this school using them. Perhaps the first general use of concrete objects or sensible material to

convey a particular state or experience arose with the romantic poets of the early nineteenth century, and there is evidence of this in the works of Shelley, Coleridge, Goethe, Madame de Staël, Schelling, Schlegel and many others, but it was probably Edgar Allen Poe who first made extensive use of such imagery and influenced the younger French poets who were looking for an alternative to the realism and objectivity of the Parnassian movement.¹

For Poe the beauty of this world was but a reflection of the "Beauty Above", which man longed to reach, and which he could apprehend, at least partly, by making use of "multiform combinations among the things and thoughts of Time."² Such ideas are obviously Platonic in essence, but what is interesting is the fact that the tangible objects and the intangible thoughts of man are yoked together in a way that obliterates any distinction between the two, so that they merge together and become part of the great scheme of things, and no longer exist as separate entities.

In this, and in his predilection for the bizarre, the ugly, the melancholy and the supernatural, as well as in his belief in the autonomy of art and the independence of the imagination, Poe undoubtedly influenced Baudelaire (1821-1867), who stands alone at this time, influenced by certain features of romantic and Parnassian theories while rejecting others and formulating his own.³ He, in turn, influenced Stephane Mallarmé (1842-1898), who derived most of his

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2. See Wimsatt and Brooks, Literary Criticism, p. 590.
theories from either Baudelaire or Poe, although he then considered them and built them into an original and personal critical framework which can be considered as a sort of manifesto for the poets of this somewhat diverse school.¹

Like romanticism, symbolism can be seen as a product of, or rather a reaction against, its age. As the Parnassians had rebelled against the growing subjectivity of romanticism in the first half of the nineteenth century, the French Symbolists rose up against the cold scientific approach of the Parnassians, searching for something of the mystery and mysticism of religious devotion in an epoch in which religion had become comparatively unimportant, while science held sway. Thus they returned to a more subjective type of verse but, while Holman is no doubt correct when he claims that "symbolism represents one of the romantic reactions to realism"², they treated their subjectivity in a different and less definable way.

Like the romantics the symbolists felt that the proper subject of art was the individual's immediate and unique emotional responses to life, and that the immediate aim of art was the complete and successful expression of such experiences. However such an attitude although subjective should not be introverted, because the poet, while talking about himself and his knowledge of life, should not be concerned only with himself but should expand his vision to include his reader who is actually taking part in his experiences and emotions through a process

of poetic synthesis, and is after all also part of Creation. So when Baudelaire cries

"Hypocrite lecteur, — mon semblable, — mon frère"¹

he is not simply damming his reader, but is recognising that his own faults are shared with all men and vice-versa, because they are all brothers in this life.

Such theories not only place the poet at the centre of his art, making his personal activities the pivot for his composition, they also make him the master of the unity of his verse, because even external objects draw their significance only from his association with them. In this way the "visible phenomena are in him; the crisis takes place in him and concerns him personally; the great universal question arise from his private history and situation. There is no clear distinction between the poet and the external world. Both are merged in him."²

Obviously, such views involve something which is fundamentally mystical, and it is in fact true that Mallarmé and the other symbolists created a sort of religion of Ideal Beauty, of "le Beau" or "l'Ideal", which man can only perceive through insight into the imperfect beauty encountered in this life, which is but a pale reflection of the Ideal. According to them, the most perfect way to achieve a higher acquaintance with this divine Beauty is through the medium of poetry. To this end Baudelaire proclaimed, "C'est par et à travers la poésie que l'âme

¹. Quoted by Bowra, The Heritage of Symbolism, p. 223.
². Ibid., p. 227.
entrevoit les splendeurs situées derrière le tombeau", and, furthermore, felt that the perfect poem was that which elucidated man's longing for the perfect world while still shackled in this world of imperfections: "c'est le témoignage d'une nature exilée dans l'imparfait et que voudrait s'emparer immédiatement sur cette terre même, d'un paradis révélé."¹

Clearly, these poets were propounding "a mystical form of Aestheticism"², in which "Art for Art's Sake" is paramount, because art is the only way in which man can aspire to a more perfect and more meaningful existence. They were not simply attempting to convey their own experiences and attitudes, but were trying to express something of the divine perfection hidden beyond the realm of the senses, of the ideal world which was for them more real than the sensible one. Thus poetry develops a certain divinity because it, as Mallarmé claimed, can improve or even save the world by its message and beauty: "Je pense que le monde sera sauvé par une meilleure littérature."³ While the poet must also be possessed of paranormal abilities to carry out this task, and must indeed become "le poète voyant", "the poet-seer", entrusted with understanding the Ideal and conveying impressions of it to others in his verse.

But how can the poet express his feelings, experiences, and his desires to re-unite with the world of Ideal Beauty when tethered to this mundane existence? For the symbolists this Ideal Beauty could only be known through the senses, albeit through those which were

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1. See Chadwick, Symbolism, p. 3.
3. See Ibid., p. 15.
refined above the normal level. Baudelaire, like all the symbolists, believed that the visible world is full of sensual experiences, like scent, colour and sound, which can excite joy or sorrow in man, or convey him to the ecstatic world of the spirit. He was also of the opinion that these experiences could be interpreted by the poet and, in "Correspondances" from Les Fleurs du Mal (1857), Nature is described as a natural temple whose pillars are living trees. As the wind plays through these pillars, these "forests of symbols" now and then blow forth confused words which the devotee, the poet, can sometimes unravel and express.¹ Similarly every sensible object in this world has a symbolic significance connected with a spiritual reality.

But even these mysterious messages must be apprehended by the senses before they can be turned into poetry which can intimate the poet's experiences and beliefs, for, although he is venturing into the domain of the intangible, reality must always be his starting point, and the transition from the real to the unreal cannot be made by the mere description of concrete realities, it requires something more.

Mallarmé recognised that this transition required in any poem a magical atmosphere if it was to reflect the unusual nature of the experience and convey it to the reader. For this reason he claimed that "to name an object is to banish the major part of the enjoyment derived from a poem, since this enjoyment consists in a process of gradual revelation", and that it was the careful manipulation of this suggestive magic which results in symbolism: "C'est le parfait usage de ce mystère qui constitue le symbole."²

¹. See Wimsatt and Brooks, Literary Criticism, p. 591.
². See Chadwick, Symbolism, p. 2 for both quotes.
In such theories the precise normal usage of any word is subordinate to its possible connotations or symbolic associations, so that it can be used according to some traditional significance, or according to the poet's intention in a particular poem, and even lose its common meaning completely. Indeed Mallarmé, who in many ways codified the vague ideals of the symbolist poets, felt that the everyday language of the people should be set apart from that of poetry, and called for a special poetic diction unconnected with everyday communication and traditional cliches. Working towards this aim, he often returned to the etymological meanings of words or used them in a new way, while Baudelaire used to invert traditional Catholic symbolism and apply it to himself or his theme in a more personal way.

However, in spite of his desire to inject something of the immediate unconscious impact of music into poetry, even Mallarmé was forced to recognise the need for sense before sound and did not seek to equate poetry to music, although Pater probably paraphrased the former's attitudes when he announced that all "art constantly aspires to the condition of music."¹ So, although these poets admired Wagner tremendously and wanted to somehow embody some of the strong instantaneous impact of his music in their poetry, they found themselves compelled to adhere to comprehensible diction.

Yet this did not imply that they should ignore the musical effects of words in an attempt to stick to their precise meanings, any more than they should have to use them in their exact meaning at the expense of possible suggestive associations, especially as music is an inherent feature of any good poem. For this reason they refused to conform to

the accepted rules of versification, which had been re-instituted by
the Parnassians after the romantic's powerful assaults upon prevailing
forms, and invented numerous new forms employing metres and rhythms
which were capable of evoking a suitable reaction on the part of the
reader, while conforming with the mood of a particular poem.
Surprisingly, Mallarmé tended towards the more traditional styles of
versification and it was, on the whole, others who experimented with
free verse and the prose poem or, like Verlaine, sought for new forms
in the sphere of folk songs and literature. ¹

But what of the nature of the symbol itself? From what has gone
before it is clear that "the use of the word (symbol) in literature
has more and more departed from that of a mere sign or allegory and
has become a term inclusive of image and metaphor, a substitute for
the 'concrete universal', a name for the basic instrument of art."²
But how can we define its nature accurately? Henri de Régnier claimed
that a symbol was "une comparaison de l'abstrait au concret dont un
des termes reste sous-entendu"³, and went on to say that the object,
emotion or state symbolised need not even be mentioned if the poet
treats the symbol correctly, so that the reader has to discover its
real nature for himself, having first experienced a subconscious
reaction to it.

Thus symbolism is not simply a matter of replacing one object
with another, but is actually the use of concrete and sensible imagery

¹. For further details see Encyclopaedia Britannica (1969), vol. 21,
"Symbolists, The".
to express ideas or experiences which are abstract and intangible. To achieve this the poet must not simply illustrate or demonstrate a particular quality in words, he must endow his words and images with a new quality which may even be independent of their normal objective meaning. He may do this in two different ways. Firstly, he can lend it a universal significance by using it in a manner which traditionally presupposes a particular reaction, just as the words "land" and "ocean" signify "time" and "eternity" while "voyage often implies "life". Or, secondly, he can breathe a totally new meaning into a word or image, which is valid only for his verse or even for a particular poem, and which would not suggest itself to the reader when separated from its poetic environment.

The fact that the symbolists were trying to convey an indefinable or supernatural experience in the language of visible and sensible things meant that practically every word is a symbol used to evoke abstract realities beyond the realm of the senses. This often forced them to join symbols together in an apparently illogical relationship, so that one of the major characteristics of their verse was an indefiniteness as great as that of the experience itself. Yet this vagueness is by no means accidental, because it reflects something of the obscurity inherent in the experiences which they are symbolising, and penetrates beyond the surface of reality, focusing the reader's eye on something beyond, thus giving an effect which is practically three-dimensional to their verse. By doing so the symbolist poet can discard the old machinery of simile and comparison and appeal immediately to his audience's powers of identification, giving only the most essential information in his symbols, and this bears fruit in a tremendous concentration of associations in their compositions, which then gain some of the direct and suggestive force of music.
Thus there can be no doubt that Bowra’s description of symbolism is in keeping with the feelings of the symbolists themselves when he writes, "Symbolism, then was in origin a mystical kind of poetry whose techniques depended on its metaphysics and whose first popularity was due to the importance that it gave to the poet’s self and to the element of music in his art." On the other hand Chadwick’s claim that symbolism is essentially "an attempt to penetrate beyond reality to a world of ideas, either the ideas within the poet, including his emotions, or the Ideas in the Platonic sense that constitute a perfect supernatural world towards which man aspires" is equally valid.

To sum up then, symbolism, as embodied in the French Symbolist Movement was, in part, a reaction against the realism and impersonality of the Parnassian school, and a return to the subjectivity of the romantic era. However, this subjectivity does not imply total self-centredness, but rather a personal attitude towards experience and Existence generally. For these poets Beauty, and not the Individuality of the Romantics, was paramount, and they incorporated even the less salubrious sides of Creation into this religion of Beauty, because even the darker aspects of Nature are in some way a reflection of the Ideal, and of the shadowy side of life in this world, for them.

They sought to express something of their mystical apprehension of this Beauty, and of the intangible forces at work in their minds and lives (and thus the lives of all mankind) in their verse by means of musical rhythms, suggestive diction and symbols, which could evoke

something beyond the intellect and the senses in their reader's heart, thus allowing him to perceive something of the divine perfection of Ideal Beauty.

However not all poets employing symbols deserve to be called "symbolist" in the strictest sense of the word, as applied to the outstanding French poets writing in the second half of the nineteenth century, who shared at least some of the aims and techniques mentioned above. In English literature their theories attracted W. B. Yeats, and influenced the Imagists\(^1\) led by T. E. Hulme and Ezra Pound, yet their theories were, on the whole, less exacting, less theoretical and less mystical than their French mentors, as they tended to be content with expressing their impressions as they found them, without seeking to exalt them to the plane of Perfect Beauty. Perhaps T. S. Eliot is the only English poet to closely follow the path of the French Symbolists, and especially Baudelaire, although nominally a follower of Pound. This is evident in his desire to evoke the emotion behind the image, and in his depiction of life as a waste land by means of symbolism rather than direct statements, or as an upward progression to the Ideal as in *Ash Wednesday* and *The Four Quartets*.

German, Russian, Italian and Spanish poets were similarly influenced by the French Symbolists to one degree or another\(^2\), yet it is true to say that these poets, with a few exceptions, should more

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2. For list of poets influenced by French Symbolists see Wellek, *A History of Modern Criticism*, p. 433, who includes Rilke, Ivanov, Yeats and Eliot amongst others; and Chadwick, *Symbolism*, p. 55-58, who includes Rilke, T. E. Hulme, Pound, Volynsky and Eliot amongst others.
properly be said to have been influenced by Symbolism than to have been Symbolists according to the aims and theories of the original school, and the same is, as we shall now see, true of symbolism when it appeared in Arabic literature.

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When we come to study symbolism in the sphere of modern Arabic literature it fast becomes clear that there is no such thing as a "symbolist school" until the 1950s, and that this school grew from previous experiments within Arabic verse itself, drawing added impetus from some modern western poets, notably T. S. Eliot.

There were however several literary trends which led and contributed to this school to a greater or lesser extent, and which were, surprisingly, more or less contemporary to each other, rather than chronologically divided as one might have expected.

The first of these is the verse of Jibrān Khalīl Jibrān who was, according to Mārūn ‘Abbūd, "the founder of two [literary] schools in Lughat ad-Dād: the Romantic and the Symbolic."¹ Yet Jibrān was not a symbolist as the term has been defined in the previous section, and was actually employing certain symbolic methods within a more general romantic framework so as to clarify his experiences and ideals, rather than using symbolic imagery however vague and obscure to convey something of their intangibility to his reader.² In this, and in his use

2. A closer study of Jibrān’s symbolism should be left until the next chapter where the Tammūz³ poets and their contemporaries will be discussed, because, in spite of the time gap involved, these poets drew heavily upon the Mahjarī experiments in formulating their own new form of symbolism, and were especially interested in Jibrān himself.
of leitmotif, myth and Christian symbolism, Jibrān was to prove more influential on the symbolist poets of the 'fifties than those poets who chose to adhere to the more restrictive principles of the French Symbolist school.

Similarly, most of the romantic poets of Apollo used certain aspects of symbolic theory in their poetry to strengthen their mode of expression, profiting from the use of symbolic allegories, imagery and diction, and from the theories of the Symbolists concerning the musical potential inherent in certain words and rhythms. They also sought to harness some of the techniques of the Symbolists as regards the expression of emotion, by using images in which senses are interchanged in a way which appears quite acceptable in the poem concerned, whereas they would seem quite extraordinary in common speech. A good example of this can be found in one of as-Ṣayrafi's poems called "ad-dahka an-nashwa", in which another symbolic technique is used, namely that of giving a concrete reality to an intangible object:

The intoxicated laugh is a wave of light

With thirsty eyes, like a song, or a confidential conversation
From the mouth of a sparrow, bewitched by perfume.¹

The first line obviously includes an exchange of sensual apprehension as a laugh is heard while light, although invisible, is normally associated with the organs of sight. Furthermore the very idea of a

¹ See Ahmad, Muḥammad Futūḥ, ar-Ramz wa-r-Ramziyya ff sh-Shi‘r al-Mu‘āṣir (Cairo, 1977), p. 251.
"wave of light", however scientifically accurate, conjures up visions of a perceptible wave of water or of something visible and tangible, and this, as has been mentioned, is also a method much used by symbolists. However, as the last two lines show, ag-Ṣayrafl was also prone to fall back upon the simple device of the simile, even if he continued to exchange the seses and use evocative imagery which is hardly pictorial.

These poets also used concrete images to elucidate mental and emotional states, and imagery calculated to have an association beyond the confines of the poem for the reader, which enhances the impact of the verse, as did Muḥammad Ḫasan Ismā‘il in the poem "ash-Shakk", in which he begs to be left alone in his imaginative world as the real world has become sour for him:

Leave me free in the Gardens of my Fancy, for their flames are more pleasant than your beautiful hills.

For you were a verdant meadow, in the scent of every flower therein I saw the head of snake,

And heard the hissing of doubt in its shadows as a soft melody is heard in a clamour,

For in it there are serpents strange to the imagination, rising with the light from every flower.¹

While Ibrāhīm Nāfī, when he proclaims,

I behold the world with weary eyes, and see around me the shades of boredom,

¹. See Ahmad, ar-Ramz wa-r-Ramsiyva, p. 254.
Dancing upon the corpses of desire, wailing above the
cadavers of hope

personifies boredom as a group of ghosts, and lends a concrete existence
to desire and hope by turning both emotions into animate creatures which
have died, and are now rotting away.

Another element in their use of symbolism was their tendency to
use colours to denote a particular reaction or idea, some of which are
unexpected and thus more effective:

So the soul wafted upon you, from the valley of despair,
drinking the wine of its white fragrance.

while some are predictable, yet communicative:

Do not leave me in this black eternity, in an abyss [whose]
depths churn, [and which is] pitch dark.

Yet these are, on the whole, some of the more superficial aspects
of symbolism, used to encourage the reader to sympathise with the poet;
in other words to assist the poet in communicating his feelings or ideas
to his audience in the most suggestive possible manner. The basic
motivation in this is obviously the romantic desire to communicate an
experience in verse, which is quite different to the intention of the

1. See Ahmad, ar-Ramz wa-r-Ramziyya, p. 264.
3. See Ibid., p. 263; from poem by Ibrāhīm Nājī.
genuine symbolist poet, who seeks to reproduce in words, with the help of evocative diction and rhythmic phrases, the poet's psychological or emotional state at the time of composition. It is thus clear that the poets of Apollo borrowed whatever they found useful or suitable from Symbolism as regards expression, format, imagery or music, but did not wish to conform to its basic principles or generally philosophy, or to compose symbolist verse similar to that of Valéry, Mallarmé, Verlaine, Rimbaud or even Baudelaire, with its inherent obscurity and sometimes abstruse imagery.

Indeed some of them even attack symbolist theories as exhibited in the work of Arab symbolist poets, and claimed that these poets were only copying Mallarmé and other French poets, without seeking to make it acceptable to the vast majority of Arab readers, while others, like ash-Shābī, reduced it to a mere conglomeration of evocative language and musical rhythms, which although delightful are not particularly significant and have little to do with the real world:

The Symbolist trend only demands that the poet talk to people from beyond the clouds or enfolded in mists.

1. For detailed discussion of the symbolic aspects of several Apollo poets, see Ahmad, ar-Ramz wa-r-Ramziyya, p. 199-202, and p. 248-267; where their use of symbolism is described as "ramziyyat at-ta'bir", "the symbolism of expression." The poet discussed include as-Ṣayrafl, Muḥammad Ḥasan Ismā‘īl, al-Hamshari, ‘Alī Maḥmūd Ṭāhā and Ibrāhīm Nājī. See also Darwīsh, ar-Ramziyya, p. 427 ff.

2. Arabic translations of these poets' works had been appearing in newspapers and magazines from about 1920 onwards. For details see Ahmad, ar-Ramz wa-r-Ramziyya, p. 174-186.

insisting only upon ambiguous and delicious language similar to music, with ambiguous diction which, whenever the listener hearkens to it, evokes melodies of feeling, fancy and imagination in his soul in a way which he has never before experienced, conveying to him, at every moment, a new expression whose delightful colours and pleasantness never cease. 1

It was this group which constitutes the third symbolic trend in modern Arabic poetry, and which was more symbolist, if one insists on using the criteria of Symbolism as seen in European and especially French literature, than the other two trends mentioned above. However the term "group" is perhaps misleading in this context as the poets who will, for the sake of convenience, be included in it were actually experimenting on their own rather than under the auspices of a proper school, as had been the case with the poets of Apollo or the Mahjar. But there was at least one unifying factor, and that was their appreciation of the French Symbolist, and their desire to introduce Symbolist criteria into Arabic literature, by writing symbolist poetry after the French model and by expounding their literary theories in essays and prefaces.

The roots of this group are very difficult to trace, especially when one takes into consideration the fact that these poets were actually writing at the same time as ‘Alî Maḥmûd Tâhâ, Ibrâhîm Nâjî and Abû Shabaka who are generally acclaimed as the greatest poets of the romantic genre in modern Arabic poetry. Indeed Adîb Maḥfâr

al-Ma‘lūf (1898–1928) was composing symbolist poems in 1925, before any of these great romantics had risen to fame, although Jibrān's contribution had already been made.

For this, and for other reasons which will become clear in the course of the following survey, it is wise to agree with Salma Khadra Jayyusi when she says that this symbolist trend grew from the long-standing influence of the French in Lebanon, which had led to a loosening of ties with their previous Arab-Islamic heritage, and left the Lebanese intelligensia with a more urbane attitude to literature and a greater ability to assimilate modern literary trends. In fact she probably identified the true motives of this group when she claimed, "If any, the Symbolist experiment in modern Arabic literature has its roots in an elitist tendency which tooks its strength from Arab bourgeois cultural curiosity and ambition."  

When we study the poetry of these symbolist poets we can find definite thematic romantic traces in their works and especially in their love poetry, which show that these poets, while being particularly interested in Symbolist Western literature, were also influenced by its Romantics and by the general romantic atmosphere of Arabic verse at this time. This was, perhaps, one of the factors which prompted Jayyusi to start her survey of Arabic Symbolism with Yusuf Ghusūb (b. 1893), calling him "a stepping stone between Romanticism and

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1. See Jayyusi, Trends and Movements, p. 476-7; see also Ahmad, ar-Ramz wa-r-Ramziyya, p. 188 ff., and Karam, ar-Ramziyya wa-l-Adab al-'Arabi l-Hadith (Beirut, 1949), p. 136-140, for the growth of French cultural influence in Lebanon.
Symbolism" and describing his verse as a "Mild Symbolist-Romantic Experiment." But it would probably be more accurate to describe him, along with Muṭrān and the Diwan Group, as a "Pre-Romantic" who, while drawing on certain romantic themes and methods, refused to accept the hackneyed imagery and dry conventions of classical Arabic poetry and demanded that art be given an autonomous position in society, in spite of the limitations of his own poetic experiments.

However, another poet published a poem called "Nashīd as-Sukūn" in 1928, and it is really with this poet, Adīb Maṣḥār, that the Symbolist trend in Arabic poetry sees the light of day. Unfortunately this year was also the year of his death, yet he still managed to bequeath a useful experiment to posterity, having composed several poems exhibiting obvious symbolist inclinations, although the poetry written before he had read Pierre Saman and Baudelaire fell squarely within the traditional conventions.

In fact there are several aspects of Adīb Maṣḥār's poetry which make his early death particularly tragic for the development of symbolism in Arabic poetry. For example, he did not shackle himself within the confines of French Symbolist theories with their single-minded concentration on the concept of Ideal Beauty and the possible semantic and musical significances of the single word, but sought to convey his

1. Jayyusi, Trends and Movements, p. 481. In the following pages Jayyusi gives a critical account of Ghuṣūb's poetry which shows both the original and less original aspects of his verse. His first, and probably most important diwan, al-Qafas al-Mahjūr, was essentially romantic and was published in 1928. See also Karam, ar-Ramziyya wa-l-Adab, p. 140 ff..

2. Part of this qāṣīda is criticised by Ahmad in ar-Ramz wa-r-Ramziyya, p. 194-196.
meaning and feelings to his reader in oblique and symbolic imagery, which was nevertheless clear:

I tell myself that the hymn of silence is sweet, like the passing of a black breeze,
And exchange (my) sighs for tears, hearing the melody of despair in my heart.1

Clearly the mood of this passage is similar to that of most romantic poets, but there is an essential difference between his treatment of this theme and that of a romantic. Although he too seeks to show his reader that he is melancholy and verging on despair he does not describe his despair openly, nor does he explicate his emotion by means of a positive simile. Rather he resorts to paradox and to the interchange of sense employed within symbolist practice. To clarify this difference more precisely it will be helpful to study the lines in the original:

1. Quoted from Ahmad, ar-Ramz wa-r-Ramziyya, p. 194. The word "heart" is literally "ribs" but the previous rendering appears more meaningful in English. The idea of a "black breeze", "an-nasm al-aswad", seems to have been particularly compelling for Ma'har and occurs many times in his verse, sometimes with the same words, "like the passing of a black breeze"; e.g. Jayyusi, Trends and Movements, p. 487, second quote.
The very title "Nashīd as-Sukūn", "The Hymn of Silence", suggests a paradox between a single sense, because "nashīd" suggests an audible and positive sound while "sukūn" is in fact the very negation of sound. This paradox is emphasised by the use of "sweet", "hulw", at the beginning of the second hemistich, because "hulw" is associated only with things we can taste, yet here it is connected rather with sound. Furthermore, the rest of this hemistich negates what has gone before by bringing in the sense of feel and by juxtaposing "hulw" with "aswād" which is itself paradoxically joined to "naṣm" which would not normally have a visible colour attributed to it.

When this line has the second added to it with the linking of "annāt", "sighs", with "admu", "tears", and the personification of the heart from which "the melody of despair" can be heard, the result is a highly original expression of personal emotion, conveyed in striking imagery couched in evocative and symbolic words and phrases, which can hardly be equalled by Sa'īd 'Aql or his contemporaries, whose verse seems superficial and obscure in comparison. For Maḥār's verse has a habit of startling its reader into an emotional state similar to that of its author at the time of composition, which is, of course, the aim of all genuine symbolist poets. This is perhaps most obvious when the poet turns to thoughts of death, which pervade many of his poems:

So, O Spectre of death, extinguish my morrow with your soft, black claw.¹

The image created in the reader's mind by this line is clearly that of a black cat, whose velvety paw comes down softly upon the poet's

1. Quoted from the Arabic, Jayyusi, Trends and Movements, p. 487.
future, bringing with it a peaceful death, but the use of "aswad" and "mikhlab" send a shiver down the reader's spine, associated as they are with fear and death. It is in his symbolic use of such words and images that Maţhar's treatment of death is distinguished from that of a romantic like ash-Shâbbî, who states his case more directly:

The blossoms of life fall silently, sadly, boringly at my feet;
The magic of life has dried up, O my weeping heart, so come, let us try death... Come. ¹

In the complex yet clear symbolist expression of his thoughts and feelings Adîb Maţhar stands apart from the other poets of this era, but, sadly, the sparsity of his poems meant that he was eclipsed by the more prolific Saţ'îd 'Aql, Bishr Fâris and Șalâb Labakî. Had he lived longer and continued in his poetic experiments there is little doubt that he would have contributed a great deal to the development of symbolist poetry, and indeed of Arabic poetry as a whole, but as it was symbolism had to wait until the 1950s for its true flowering when poets again turned to symbolism to clarify their expression, rather than to compose poetry according to a particular literary philosophy.

The poet who probably did more than any other individual in introducing Symbolist theories into Arabic literature was Saţ'îd 'Aql (b. 1912),

¹. Kirîq, p. 65-66. It should, however, be pointed out that ash-Shâbbî was also capable of symbolic expression concerning death:

I shall melt in the dawn of eternal beauty, and drink from the pool of lights.

Ibid., p. 110.
who is often described as the first Arab symbolist poet, at Maghar's expense. It is however true that Sa'id 'Aql was the first poet to insist on the implementation of French Symbolist ideas, when he started publishing his works in various periodicals and newspapers in 1933.¹

As we shall see 'Aql admired the French school a great deal and was especially fond of Abbé H. Brémond, Valéry and Mallarmé, whose theories are echoed again and again in his own critical works, although his creative ability as regards their concepts remained somewhat limited. Like his French counterparts 'Aql sought the Perfect Ideal hidden from the senses through the senses, and attempted to make their concept of Ideal Beauty into a cult, yet he was probably more successful in doing so by means of critical essays and lectures than through his own poetic composition.

For 'Aql, poetry did not exist in the same realm as prose which, he claimed, was the result of conscious invention, while the former was more divine and originated in the subconscious; "I believe that the subconscious is the most important aspect [in the composition] of poetry, while the most important in prose is the conscious."² In this unconscious state the poet's mind is above emotions, images and ideals and rests in pure tranquility, in whose depths poetry unites harmoniously with Truth:

[In the very act of poetic] composition, I am neither conscious of myself nor of any clear thing ... [for]

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¹ For details see Aḥmad, ar-Ramz wa-r-Ramziyya, p. 197. For discussion of his lectures and articles, see Karam, ar-Ramziyya wa-l-Adab, p. 148-154.
² 'Aql, Sa'id, Introduction to al-Majdaliyya (Beirut, 1960), p. 17.
the poet, when composing, is not overcome by thoughts, images or emotions, and if any of these do overcome him then his work is spoilt. The aids of the conscious ... have no part to play in poetry. ¹

However such a condition is, by its very intensity, short-lived and cannot be sustained for more than a verse or a part thereof, and the poet must polish and mould his verse for the rest of the poem.

Such theories are obviously reminiscent of those of Mallarmé and of Valéry, and the same is true of his attitude towards the musical characteristics of verse. Indeed, according to ‘Aql, music is not simply a characteristic of verse, it is verse: "Poetry is music, in which delicate themes penetrate to the depths of our souls." ² But perhaps this was actually an exaggeration on his part, because he tempers it slightly in another statement, in which poetry is simply compared to music: "Poetry is a subconscious state which is beyond description or explanation, whose essence is like that of music." ³ Clearly music actually dominates the act of creativity in ‘Aql’s theories, just as it had for Brémond and the other Symbolists, but how does it influence the poet’s audience?

In explaining this ‘Aql resorts to Bergson’s concept of art and the sleeping conscious, and to the symphonic use of words and phrases:

[When the conscious mind is confronted with more than one sound] it tries to apprehend these multiple,

1. Introduction to al-Majdalivyva, p. 17-18.
2. See Ahmad, ar-Ramz wa-r-Raṣaivya, p. 211.
3. Introduction to al-Majdalivyva, p. 28.
combined sounds [in one instant], and exerts itself
. . . but these exertions are useless, so it tires
and falls short of its target; and it is thus that
the multiple sounds are left alone to address
themselves [immediately] to the subconscious. 1

To this end every word should be carefully chosen so that it fits
perfectly into its fellows as regards rhythm and association, while
also concurring totally with the poet's thematic and expressive
intention. To do so the word need not necessarily comply with the
normal rules of everyday communication and may be given a new or
special significance according to the part it has to play. In fact
'Aql even believed that normal literary Arabic could be dislocated if
necessary, and did so in his own poetry if he felt the result was more
in harmony with his intention than the correct grammatical equivalent.
An example of this can be see in his use "Al al-mawsül", in which the
verb has the letters alif and lam prefixed to it:

\[\text{د ام دنـت يانبـنها ـب طلاع}\]

This is of course forbidden, although mentioned, by classical philologists,
and is actually borrowed from the colloquial and used in place of
"allati", so that the line should read:

1. Introduction to al-Majdaliyya, p. 31-32.
2. See Jayyusi, Trends and Movements, p. 506. Here she calls the "ال-
the "definite article", and describes this form as a "new freedom
in the grammatical use of words", perhaps being unaware of its more
obvious colloquial usage, although the translation quoted under-
stands its significance correctly.
And which subdues — may it be exalted — the hand of the ambitious.

This practice was followed by other poets, notably Yūsuf al-Khāl (b. 1917), but does not appear to have been used in literary Arabic before this time.1

While Moreh claims that 'Aql's underlying motive in this instance might have been to bring "poetry closer to daily conversation"2, this clashes badly with other ideas, such as 'Aql's belief that Latin characters were more suitable for Arabic poetry3, and one cannot help but suspect that 'Aql was more interested in finding new ways to express himself than in making poetry more available to the masses.

According to his viewpoint there was only one true criterion for poetry and that was "Imagination" and not the desire to please an audience, or to imitate reality. In fact the poet should rather create a new reality in his verse, which is a direct, albeit complex result of a highly personal experience, because poetry draws its inspiration only from the subjective reactions of the poet towards life and Existence generally.4

In his introduction to al-Majdaliyya, 'Aql announced that the poet, when in the subconscious state necessary for successful artistic creation, "unites intimately with the Eternal Truths of this awesome Universe"5, and claims that the expression of this union is one of the

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1. Moreh would appear to agree with this: see M. A. Poetry, p. 281.
2. See Ibid., p. 281.
4. See Ahmad, ar-Ramz wa-r-Ramziyya, p. 224.
5. Introduction to al-Majdaliyya, p. 28.
methods employed by poets in their quest to convey something of the mystery of Ideal Beauty in their verse. To do so the poet must aim at artistic perfection, even if he falls short of his target, for it can only be attained if the poet "is able to combine the whole achievement of (his) poetic heritage . . . (with his) own originality."¹

We shall now see how far 'Aql himself succeeded in combining his heritage and his own theories, and see if his poetic experiments are a successful combination of the two, or if they are merely the results of somebody trying to implement a particular literary philosophy in verse.

'Aql's most famous poem al-Majdaliyya was published in 1937, and concerns the story of Mary Magdalene. However the poet seems more interested in glorifying Beauty as exemplified in woman than in telling the story of her life and relationship with Jesus, or portraying her psychological or spiritual development, so that the poem fails to investigate any of the conflict or passion so obviously involved in the Biblical narrations, and is as a result generally tranquil and majestic.

There is indeed something dignified about this poem, but this arises from 'Aql's attitude towards the Magdalene's beauty and charm rather than from her respect for Christ or her later spirituality. Thus, although she is described as a femme fatale who leads men astray, she is given a certain sublimity and even purity:

The eye is purified when it sees her in brilliant fornication stained red with white.

¹. Quoted from an interview in 1960; see Jayyusi, Trends and Movements, p. 506.
Men knew the intoxication of love in a fresh body where pleasures were green
And rubbed [their] white foreheads in its fragrance, and delayed the morrow a little.¹

This dignity is obviously a result of her immense charms, so that men, while aware of her sinfulness, cannot resist her beauty and are irresistibly attracted to her. The previous quotation is clearly a demonstration of some essential source of purity in Mary Magdalene's character in spite of her debaucher, so that, although the tension between the two is clearly expressed, her attractions prove more effective than her vices. But 'Aql did not always manage to refrain from exaggerating her influence over men to the point of the ridiculous:

The great men of Rome bowed down before her, and the men of her conquests and her dreams.
A statue, shining [reclining] on lofty couches [surrounded by] slaves and candles.²

and it is in such blatant worship of Beauty that the basic thematic fault of this poem lies. 'Aql failed to depict the darker sides of Mary Magdalene's character forcibly, indeed he failed to characterise her completely, and relied on her purely superficial and external features throughout the poem. Nowhere is she torn apart because of her spiritual aspirations but depraved material existence, and nowhere

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¹ al-Majdaliyya, p. 54.
² Ibid., p. 57-8.
is her impassioned conversion to Christ brandished before our eyes. In fact at the point where the poem should reach some sort of emotional climax we find ‘Aql prostrate before her beauty and grace, rather than swept away in the contrast of the personality of Jesus and that of the prostitute:

She advanced gracefully towards him, and trembling the Earth watched Beauty meet the Divine.¹

However the poem still retains the right to be described as "one of the most charming poems in modern Arabic"², because of the controlled music of the verse, his careful manipulation of language and his evocative diction, as we shall now see.

In al-Majdaliyya ‘Aql showed himself capable of controlling rhythm and rhyme so as to exploit the sonorous and musical qualities of his diction to his best advantage:

وتنوايع الجمال، وعزرا لذة الوصل في سرير الحياة
من صبا الجميلة اقتسموا العود، ومن رأسها النقيبات
فوقع اسم في جو "اورشليم" فنطقة العطر في جواد الربع.

1. al-Majdaliyya, p. 77.  
3. al-Majdaliyya, p. 54.  

Translation:

And they sang with Beauty, and shook the pleasures of reunion on the couch of life,  
Snatching the lute from the youth of the Magdalene, and melodies from the tinkle of her glass.  
A name throbbed in the air of Jerusalem, [like] the throb of scent in the spring atmosphere.
There is clearly a connection between meaning and rhythm in this quote, as the clever parallelism between "taghannaw" and "hazzū" and between "min qibā" and "min rann", reflects the tempo of the singing mentioned in the first line and the melodies of the second, while the use of "khafqa" and "khafqa" in the last line illustrates the image of a name sounding throughout the city and of scent "palpitating" in a spring meadow full of flowers. Furthermore the obvious connection between the first two lines as far as rhyme is concerned, and their distinction from the final line, mirrors the changed thematic content. But the melodious nature of these lines goes deeper than this and draws its fundamental quality from ‘Aql's inspired use of the internal musical suggestivity of words, rather than from the use of simple parallelism or rhyme. It is perhaps unfortunate that he seldom manages in his later diwāns to recapture this talent which was so often the saving grace of his earlier poems and this tends to make his later works prone to a certain artificiality and dullness.

However there is nothing artificial about much of the imagery of al-Majdaliyya, as it is often extremely expressive, and has an immediate impact on the reader. The fact that ‘Aql could achieve this effect with images that involve no movement, while actually discussing movement illustrates his power of suggestiveness:

And she pronounced what might be considered speech, while the silence grew slower and now strayed off.¹

Furthermore his control of symbolic paradox is often startling in its associations. In the line

¹. al-Majdaliyya, p. 71.
Is it the greatest affliction that has tyrannised [her] cheeks, [causing] a commotion in the peace.¹

this is not taken to extremes, and although the connection of "hudū" and "iṣṭidām" is rather difficult to assimilate intellectually, the psychological despair and distress which is displayed by this image is suggestively communicated to the reader. But another example including the idea of sound is less successful:

She plucked a hymn from her beloved's hoarseness, and reclaimed its sighs as verse.²

because the language itself is unclear, and because the image of the second hemistich is totally incomprehensible. While it is acceptable that the rough voice of her lover can be turned into a melodious sound by her love, an image which is rather effective on its own, it is difficult to see what is so significant in the "sighs" (āḥāt) of his "hoarseness" (buhā). Indeed the idea is so obscure that the whole line is destroyed by it; and any beauty in the first hemistich totally lost.

Where 'Aql does excel in the use of paradox is in the line previously quoted describing the Magdalene:

بيظهر الطرف ان رآها على نير عهر مخمن ببيض

1. al-Majdaliyya, p. 63:

اهب همّ الهموم جار على خدين هدي لئني الهدوء، اصطلام

2. Ibid., p. 52.

3. Ibid., p. 54. "The eye is purified when it sees her in brilliant fornication stained red with white."
The placing of "yathuru" at the beginning of the line and "bayāḍ" at the end emphasises the fact that the Magdalene in spite of all her sins has an element of purity about her, a contrast which is further consolidated by "navyir ‘ihr", in which the act of fornication is made to dazzle the reader by its impact. The climax is undoubtedly in "mukhaddab bi-bayāḍ", which is paradoxical within itself. Although this image is not valid at a pictorial level it is effective because of the feelings which it evokes in the reader's mind. Red is associated with sin and lewdness and with blood, and would not normally be found linked with white, the symbol of purity and innocence, yet it is the very impossibility of something being tinged red by whiteness that causes the reader's violent reaction, so that the images of purity and sinfulness mingle together in his mind just as they mingle in the personality of Mary Magdalene.

In this way 'Aql proved that his imagery could have a dynamic impact on his reader, but it must be admitted that, as in this case, he seldom sustained such brilliant imagery and effect for more than one or two lines at a time, and even resorted, on several occasions, to classical rhetoric or purely descriptive passages. Some of these are predictably from the sections concerning Mary Magdalene's awesome beauty:

The laurel branch [fell] broken before her, and the splendour of the crown bowed down low;
The thrones revered her, the people revered her, as she trampled on the hearts of all.¹

¹. For another example of white to denote innocence, see al-Majdaliyya, p. 49, where white is again associated with the colour red, and with forbidden pleasures.
This passage is more reminiscent of classical *qasidas* devoted to eulogising some great warrior king than of a poet talking of the charms of a fallen woman, however beautiful. In fact even the tone and the rhythm are classical and slightly pompous:

\[ \text{سُمِّعَ الطَّفائِرُ دونَا في الأَكْسَارِ وَسَمِّيَ النِّجَامُ مُطَأَّرًا في زَوْعٍ} \]

From this we can see that *al-Majdaliyya*, while generally accomplished as regards symbolic imagery, suggestive diction and musical rhythms, also possesses certain intermittent weaknesses. But this is the case with any long poem because poetic inspiration is hardly suited to the sustained inventiveness necessary for such an *opus*. Yet there is one basic flaw running through the fibre of the whole poem, and that is 'Aql's failure to build the character of Mary Magdalene, so that even the most striking passages in which sinfulness and innocence are juxtaposed are invariably diluted by surrounding imagery, which usually describes her beauty or her influence over men. In fact Jayyusi's claims that an "atmosphere of controlled awe dominates the poem"\(^2\) is undoubtedly correct, because 'Aql is more interested in showing Mary Magdalene as an emanation of Ideal Beauty than in portraying her as a passionate and tormented human being.

A similar problem arises when we turn to his love poetry which, although sometimes lyrical and finely executed in a style similar to that of *al-Majdaliyya*, also concentrates on the external features of the fair sex. Many of these have been gathered together in the *diwan*

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Rindalā, published in 1950. This is a collection of poems dedicated to various different women whom the poet has loved, but we seldom find any passionate desire in them. Indeed it is unusual to find him announcing,

Do not allow the night to slip past us. (For) how do you know we shall live till the dawn?[^1]

and it is more in keeping with the tone of the rest of the diwān when he encourages her to withhold her favours, although aware of her attractions:

Be miserly, miserly until the day when the eye no (longer) awakes and the playful do not play.

For the women in these poems are dreams, manifestations of Beauty to be adored from afar, which the poet would not touch even if in close proximity thereto:

Your closeness to me is a temple which (must) not be violated, which should be visited and sought from afar.^[2]

These women are obviously something practically sacred to ‘Aql, and their holiness would be spoilt by base contact. In the poem "'Alī r-Rukhāma" he puts the following words into his beloved Mirkayān’s mouth:

2. Quoted from Ibid., p. 500, for both quotes.
I am Mirkayān, the vision, I am the one after whom Beauty dies.

Because of me Existence became Existence, as did the nights.¹

In this quote Mirkayān is not woman alone, she is also the life force of the Universe, and as an extension of this his creative principle, his Muse, and it is in this way that the women in this volume, and in Ajmalu minki? Lā!² must be treated. ‘Aql himself claimed that "man's longing for the beauty of woman represents his deep aspiration for the Absolute"³, and when one studies the poem of these two collections it is difficult to see them as anything other than part of his attempt to propagate a cult of Ideal Beauty. For there is very little difference between the poems of ar-Rindalā and those of Ajmalu minki? Lā! despite the time-gap in between. As we have seen the poem "‘Aql r-Rukhāma" described his beloved as the origin of all beauty and of all Existence, and again in Ajmalu minki? Lā! he announces:

Before you there was nothing in Existence.

Did this violet exist

Resting upon my swinging waist?⁴

If his love poems are seen thus the reasons for the lack of emotional involvement and of any mention of the poet's personal involvement become clear. The ambiguous tone of many of these poems is also

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1. Quoted from Ahmad, ar-Ramz wa-r-Ramziyya, p. 229.
explained, as is the pervasive emphasis on distant adoration rather than on physical or emotional proximity. However ‘Aql's attempt to communicate his devotion to the Absolute through the medium of love for beautiful women can hardly be described as a success, because he remains distant from the objects of his devotion throughout. One can only assume that he was not in fact looking for mystical union with this Absolute but was rather seeking to convey its infinite majesty and grandeur, and his relationship to it, that of a pious but not mystical devotee towards his god.¹

However Saʿīd ‘Aql did not restrict himself within the confines of lyrical verse and long poetic pieces but also experimented in the sphere of poetic drama. In 1935 he published Bint Yaftāh, a tragedy which exhibited romantic tendencies, and then, in 1944, he published Qadmūs which exhibited a quite different style and tone. In this play ‘Aql tried to exploit the legend of Cadmus, the Prince of Sidon, who leaves his kingdom to look for his sister, Europe, who has been seized by Zeus, and to bring her back to Sidon. As in all good legends, Cadmus has to accomplish several difficult tasks before he may attain his goal, and this would appear to be very suitable material for an epic poem.²

But, as we have already seen, ‘Aql's expertise is not particularly suited to dramatic composition and Qadmūs suffered the same fate as

¹ A good example of this relationship can be found in the poem "Ukhtuhā" in Ajmalu minki? Lā!, p. 83.
² For the story of the legend of Cadmus, see Pears Encyclopaedia of Myths and Legends (London, 1976), p. 157 and index. For discussion of both Bint Yaftāh and Qadmūs see Karam, ar-Ramziyya wa-l-Adab, p. 171-173.
Bint Yaftūh, which had been distinctive for its intermittent lyricism rather than for any sustained dramatic effect. In view of the fact that one attempt at writing a play had already failed, it is perhaps surprising to find ‘Aql making a second attempt nearly ten years later. Perhaps, in view of the success of al-Majdaliyya, which had been warmly greeted by the literary public, he felt that his audience was now more capable of appreciating poetic drama, or perhaps he believed that his previous theme had lacked appeal and that Qadmus, dealing with the ancient grandeur of the Lebanon, would be more topical and significant.

Yet such a theme was not a particularly emotive one for the Arab, or even the Lebanese public at that time, although it has gained some currency in more recent years. It is naturally difficult for a nation to identify with a culture which is ancient and perished centuries before, and this is even more difficult in the case of the Phoenician civilisation and that of modern Lebanon, divided as they are by hundreds of years of Arab-Islamic culture, not to mention European accretions.

For this reason a Phoenician theme would have required skilful handling so as to touch a living chord in the Lebanese heart. Had ‘Aql chosen to emphasise the universal significances of the legend, such as valour, honour, retribution, love and heroic warfare, the play might have been a success. But he decided to use it as a platform for his passionate belief in Lebanese nationalism, and the Phoenician civilisation was too far removed from the Lebanese heart to react to such a theme, because the Lebanese did not see the Phoenicians as intimate ancestors with whom they could associate. Yet this should not detract from the beauty of sections of this play, in which ‘Aql continued in his pursuit of symbolist techniques.
In this play his penchant for paradox is again displayed, and although the play itself lacks dramatic tension, the conflict inherent in the theme is reflected in certain passages:

Add to the voice the tone of sweet honey, and add the clash of irascible spears.¹

Clearly the use of parallelism which we found in al-Majdaliyya is again being employed, reflecting the theme in which love and war are so inextricably joined. Similarly, he continues to use tangible objects symbolically to convey a basically inexplicable emotion:

My ship is obedient,
Vanquishing the conquering waves;
Drawing gold, and ivory
From the blood of the sunset.²

The message of the first two lines is perfectly clear and requires no explanation; however that of the last two lines is more complex. The last two lines draw their strength simultaneously from two different sources: the pictorial and the abstract. On the pictorial level the "blood of the sunset" obviously conjures up the image of a solitary ship silhouetted against the setting sun in the ocean, but the ocean is that of life and the ship is a symbol for the intrepid traveller. Furthermore, the "gold" and ivory could simply describe the rays of

¹. For Arabic text see Jayyusi, Trends and Movements, p. 504.
². Quoted from the English, Ibid., p. 504.
the setting sun, but they are both precious and come from far-flung exotic climes. So the image is now complete: it is, at a purely physical level, that of a ship set against the sun as it falls lower in the sky, but, at a more profound level, also symbolises our hero setting out on a dangerous mission which he knows may take him to distant lands, where he alone can protect himself against many dangers.

Another interesting aspect of this quotation is its rhythm and rhyme structure, which reflect the motion of waves rushing up to a beach, or perhaps more fittingly, lapping against the side of a boat:

Yet although 'Aql experimented with rhyme, image and syntax\(^1\) in this play, he also fell back on classical images and rhetoric. On one occasion we find him employing the traditional image of the proud eagle who normally soars in the sky, but can be encouraged to fly lower by a mighty ruler:

\[
\text{Tempting an eagle to stoop his wing; [one] who had fixed his brow in the circus of the stars.}^2
\]

but his treatment of the image is original and majestic in both language and rhythm, so that it is by no means a hackneyed copy of another poet's genius.

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1. For examples see Jayyusi, Trends and Movements, p. 504 and p. 506. The actual nature of the use of "Al al-mawsūl" in the quote on p. 506 has of course already been discussed.

2. For Arabic text, see Ibid., p. 505.
The same is true of the rhetorical tone of some of the more nationalistic sections of Qadmus, although some are more successful than others. But it is in the descriptions of Lebanon that some of the most beautiful imagery and language is to be found, as in the following quotation in which the mountain villages are practically promoted to the sublime:

... of villages [made] from emeralds, hanging close to the clouds, [lit up] by blue light,
Which pass even the theatre of the sun, [and] fix my country in the limits of the sky.  

But in spite of these virtues the play is rather dry and uneventful, which is probably to be expected as the symbolist approach adopted by 'Aql is more suited to shorter lyrical compositions, especially in view of the obvious difficulties faced by our author as regards his treatment of emotion and dramatic events generally, and thus 'Aql will be remembered not as an accomplished playwright, but as a symbolist poet.

From what has gone before it is clear that Sa'id 'Aql drew on both modern and classical sources in his verse, in an attempt to produce new and original symbolist effects in his poetry. However, he sometimes failed to achieve his aim, and because of this his poetry is

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1. For a bad example, see Jayyusi, Trends and Movements, p. 505; for a good one, p. 505-6.
2. For Arabic text, see Ibid., p. 505.
sometimes good but definitely classical in essence, as in the following extract from al-Majdaliyya:

Has the Magdalene confessed now, or has she prayed? She has withdrawn madly into [the world] of fantasy, [And] spoken to the Creator of Beauty, the god of Love, about love, sweetly. [As for] beauty She has bade it farewell in enjoying the days before autumn [comes], before the end.¹

Yet although this quote contains many classical features, such as the rhetorical question at the beginning and the extreme clarity and balance of the image, it is not without more modern elements. For example, the last two lines constitute a single unit as regards meaning and syntactical structure, whereas its classical counterpart would contain two separate units, each of which would be independent of the other, while the counterpoise in the last hemistich is also strikingly original, and effective, when seen as part of the whole.²

As for the more symbolist aspects of his verse, they lie partly in its musical rhythms which, as we have seen, did not always fall within the bounds of classical conventions, as he manipulated rhyme and metre to reflect the content and mood of each particular verse. They are also to be found in his careful use of diction and masterful control of paradox, both of which enabled him to evoke reactions and

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¹. al-Majdaliyya, p. 80-1.
². The last hemistich:
imagery in the reader's being which were often totally divorced from
the pictorial or sensible significance of the verse. Also, as we have
seen, he sought to intimate his relationship with the Beauty of the
Absolute, and the essential nature of this Ideal, through the medium of
his love poetry and through the story of al-Majdaliyya, and this too
was an example of his desire to introduce Symbolist theories into
Arabic literature.

He employed another Symbolist technique when he indulged in the
interchange of the various senses, so that a sensible object, whether
concrete or abstract, is linked with a sense totally unsuited to it on
a physical level. Indeed he even mixed more than two senses together,
to produce images which are immediately suggestive and comprehensible,
only divulging their inherent complexity on closer examination:

Your passion, 0 poet, is the song of the Idea,
More delicious, more pleasant, [and] sweeter than a scent
from the past. ^

Obviously the poet is again using sensible mundane things to convey the
Ideal beyond the senses of hearing, smell and taste mentioned in these
lines, just as had been the case with Mallarmé and the other great
Symbolists.

There is, however, a certain intellectuality about 'Aql's symbolism
as a whole, despite his inspired use of its various techniques on
numerous occasions. In fact Badawi's comment upon al-Majdaliyya could
be extended to cover a great deal of 'Aql's verse:

1. Ajmelu minki? Lāf, p. 112.
inspired by French Symbolist poetic theory and practice [he] wrote poetry such as Magdalen (1937) in which he reacted against the emotionalism and dilution of romanticism and tried to produce works of severe beauty which, however, tended to be rather cold and lifeless.¹

Perhaps the cause of this flatness is the lack of human emotion of conflict in most of ‘Aql's poems, which seem to draw no strength whatsoever from his own experiences, so that we learn nothing of the author or of his life through his poetry. Because of this we find his poetry somehow lacking in the spontaneity so familiar in his masters, the French Symbolist poets of the late nineteenth century, who were devoted to expressing their own philosophies and feelings in oblique and symbolic language which evoked similar experiences or states in their audience.

It is somehow disturbing that Sa‘īd ‘Aql continually astounds us with his striking imagery and use of language², yet fails to maintain his hold on us generally, because these images are so often surrounded by abstruse comments, insipid statements, or incomprehensible ideas and symbols. Yet this is seldom true of his more conventional pieces, which are far more natural than his symbolist verse, and often more evocative in their suggestiveness and associations.³

This can help us to at least surmise as to the cause of the atmosphere of unreality and the lack of any genuine commitment in his

¹. M.A.P., p. 207.
². See Darwish, ar-Ramziyya, p. 441.
³. For criticism of ‘Aql’s verse generally, see Karam, ar-Ramziyya wa-l-Adab, p. 157-171.
verse. In trying to introduce French Symbolist theories into Arabic literature, ‘Aql cut himself off partially from his native culture and literary heritage, which is something a symbolist poet cannot afford to do, relying as he does on cultural and universal associations for effect in his verse. Moreover the object of symbolist verse is to discover the fundamentals of life and art through personal experience and experimentation, whereas ‘Aql reversed this procedure and based his theories, and his attempts to put them into practice, on previous conceptions drawn from an external source.

However, although ‘Aql was only partially successful in his desire to produce a strong and influential genre of poetry which could counteract the wilting, negative romanticism prevalent in most of Arabic literature at that time, he successfully introduced some of the basic concepts of Symbolism through his better poems and critical works. The poets of the ’fifties found they could build upon this foundation although few poets sought to imitate him, with the exception of Bad‘ Ḥaqqī and several minor poets, because his poetry and his unique attitudes left him outside the main trends of Arabic poetry, which continued to be essentially romantic, until the truly Symbolist explosion of the 1950s.

Five years after Sa‘īd ‘Aql had begun publishing poems in various newspapers, Ṣalāḥ Labākī published his first collection of verse, Urjūḥat al-Qamar, which he had been compiling for the previous ten years, since 1928.  

2. See Ahmad, ar-Ramz wa-r-Ramziyya, p. 197 for details.
As can be seen from his book *Lubnān ash-Shā'ir*¹, Labakī admired ‘Aql’s poetry and literary philosophy just as he respected the French Symbolist School, but he did not seek to imitate either of them, but rather sought to benefit from the theories and practice of French Symbolism while retaining his own literary independence.²

An example of this can be seen in his attitude towards the composition of verse and the poet’s state while in the act of poetic creation. As we have seen ‘Aql believed that the conscious had absolutely no place whatsoever in poetry, either during the actual writing or in the reader’s enjoyment thereof. In his discussion, ‘Aql announced that

the poet, when composing, is not overcome by thoughts, images or emotions, and if any of these do overcome him then his work is spoilt . . . The aids of the conscious have no part to play in poetry.³

Labakī was, however, less extreme. Like ‘Aql he believed that poetry found its origins in a mental state, free from worries, but did not claim that this state was that of the subconscious. He contended that parts of the conscious workings of the poet’s mind were suspended so that the more poetic influences could overcome the poet, rendering him capable of artistic creation:

2. See Karam, *ar-Ramziyya wa-l-Adab*, p. 175-76.
3. See the introduction to *al-Majḍaliyya*, p. 17-18, and p. 31-32.
The poetic state is that in which the rational and conscious power [of the mind] is to some extent suspended ... and the spiritual life [of the poet] is increased to its limits [so that it] surrenders itself to dreams, and to contemplation of the images which the imagination presents.¹

But both these theories agree on at least one point, and that is that any genuine artistic act is essentially spontaneous, because it springs from the poet's being and not from intellectual invention, although the latter may give polish to the result after the original impetus has spent its force. According to this theory the concept of a poetic school is invalid, so it is hardly surprising to find Labakî announcing his dislike for such an idea: "I do not believe in poetic schools, nor do I follow certain principles concerning composition, or subject myself to preconceived, restrictive rules."²

As the foundation of all poetry (qawām ash-shi‘r) is, according to Labakî, imagery, the poet cannot afford to tie himself to a particular theory, and especially one drawn from external sources, because images are in fact, "genuine and sincere psychological states which can exist without being communicated."³ Thus any poem originates in the imagination of its composer, and this imagination draws on all his experiences and attitudes in formulating particular images: "[For poetry] is the story of the whole range of life, in processions of images, visions, dreams and emotions."⁴

¹. Labakî, p. 34.
². Quoted from Ahmad, ar-Ramz wa-r-Ramziyya, p. 231.
³. Labakî, p. 35-36.
⁴. Ibid., p. 34.
In view of this it is hardly surprising that while Labaki thought that the most difficult part of poetic composition was "finding the correct words to express"\(^1\) his reactions to a particular experience, he also believed that content took precedent over form in any poem, and that while structure was the most important aspect of the visual arts "content was the foundation of the literary arts."\(^2\)

All these views are, of course, in line with those of the French School who saw poetry as the poet's oblique expression of his subjective emotions and attitudes, in a natural form which was harmonious with these ideas and feelings, and free from affectation and artificiality. We shall now see how far Labaki succeeded in implementing his theories in his verse.

Like his French mentors Labaki tried to penetrate the essence of untarnished Truth, using the senses to reach the Ideal, which can be at least partially apprehended by the poet, but cannot be directly described. In his poem "Layta" he sought to convey something of his mystical longing for the Ideal in terms of sensible imagery:

I wish I could grasp the melody in the cool light,
And fill my eyes with the colours of the later afternoon,
And smell sweetness until the sweetness of the hills faded away
Receiving me, and casting me into the bosom of a friend.\(^3\)

The interchange of senses so common in Symbolist poetry is here used to great advantage, as the reader is immediately aware of the inexpressible

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1. Labākī, p. 36.
2. Ibid., p. 27.
3. Labākī, Mawā'īd (Beirut, 1943), p. 16.
sublimity of the poet's feelings as he contemplates the prospect of union with Ideal Beauty. The first line is the clearest example of this, and is masterfully controlled, as the senses of touch, sight and hearing are closely joined so that, in spite of the physical impossibility of the image, the reader reacts instantaneously to it, experiencing an emotion which is consolidated by the following three lines, in which sight and the sense of touch are linked as part of the same psychological state.

Labakī used sensual imagery in the previous quote to convey a spiritual experience, successfully superimposing the Ideal upon the world of the senses by abstract images. To the same end he often employed personification or concrete imagery, as in the following example, in which he tries to elucidate something of the nature of poetic composition:

A confused vision passed by me, and images
Circled in my mind, so my mind became blank.
And from here, and here, skeletons arise,
And dull eyes in which the black is clouded
And bleak eyes, pale, seeing nothing,
Which my lips mock, while my tears forgive.¹

In this extract he is obviously seeking to intimate something of the bewilderment which he has experienced. The fact that he entitled this qaṣīda "Sakrān", perhaps helps us to understand it more clearly at a purely physical level, but he is in fact trying to show his audience

¹. Mawā'id, p. 19.
how the inspired state of poetic creation has a darker, less edifying side to it, quite different from its sweet nature so often portrayed by romantics and classicists alike.

The above image is terrifying in its dimensions but the last line is melancholy rather than frightening, and it is just such melancholia that pervades much of Labaki's poetry, which, we feel, helps us to know something of the poet's personality, unlike the poetry of Sa'id 'Aql whose emotions were well hidden. Indeed Labaki's verse is full of vague longing for something extremely precious and indescribable:

I wish I could enfold the ages, age after age,
For I see the winters of splendid beauty in the roots.
And legends, when will they rise and sing in [Man's] mind?

The women in his poems are also described in brilliant yet vague terms, and are more like radiant figures from a dream than warm flesh and blood:

You are the sweet fragrance of a flower, you are not
[fashioned] from the mud of Man.
You are a pulse of light upon a wave of bewitchment.

What is interesting in this quotation is the fact that she is described in abstract rather than concrete terms: she is the scent of a flower, or a pulse of light carried on a wave of magic. Such imagery is

1. See Karam, ar-Ramziyya wa-l-Adab, p. 174.
2. Mawā'id, p. 16-17.
3. Ibid., p. 45.
obviously intended to enhance the charm and beauty of the beloved in question, without mentioning a single physical feature; a technique which is commonly employed by Labakî, but is especially noticeable in his poems concerning women.¹

Like his contemporary Sa‘îd ‘Aql, Labakî used colours in his verse, but often gave them a significance beyond themselves. As we have seen in the poem "Layta" he wanted to fill his eyes "with the colours of the late afternoon", and used these colours to signify the majestic shades of some distant Ideal, while he longed to smell "the sweetness of the hills."² These two ideas occur in close proximity more than once in his poetry:

As for my beloved, she is this scent, like the spectre
of [some] blue felicitation.³

Here the loved one is again described in abstract terms in the first hemistich, while the second hemistich has at least two symbolic meanings. The first is comparatively simple as the "tayf", the spectre, could also be the white halo of a cloud which has the sun shining behind it, a meaning which would be totally in keeping with the use of "azraq" which is in fact sky-blue. However the associations of this phrase are more profound, because the "tayf" is also the figure which is seen in a dream, so his beloved is once more endowed with a

¹. See also Kawâ’id, p. 16.
². Ibid., p. 16.
³. Ibid., p. 32. The gender in Arabic is masculine, but Labakî is here writing within the classical tradition of calling his beloved "habîbi", rather than "habîbatî".
dream-like quality, while the word "azraq" now lends a transcendent aspect to her physical quality, implying something of the brilliance and the vastness of a clear sky.

However, in spite of his ability to break with convention on several points such as rhythm and the use of the line as a single unit of meaning, Labakī sometimes fell back into classical forms and direct statement. Thus in "Risāla" he announces, in rhetorical vein:

O separated one, where are the past times, the sweet rendezvous and the bond of friendship?
Days when we watered the nights with destiny when the light was in the furthest wastes, far off.
Our rendezvous mocked the dawn, for the dawn was drowned with our desires.1

But this should not detract from the standard of the rest of his poems as even his most classical have a certain symbolic quality about them, and are generally finely executed.

From what has been discussed above it is clear that Ǧalāḥ Labakī was writing with the Symbolist tradition and benefitting from its techniques, but his poetry possesses one striking quality which distinguishes him from many symbolists but does not exclude him from their ranks. This quality is the comparative clarity which is the hallmark of his verse, especially when compared to the verse of Saʿīd

1. Mawāʿīd, p. 68–69. For example of meaning being carried syntactically from one line to another, see Ibid., p. 19. We have already mentioned the use of "ḥabībi" applied to the female beloved.
‘Aql. The reason for this probably lies in the fact that Labaki believed that the poet should convey his emotional state of feeling in his verse, and that any lack of emotion resulted in a deficiency in the poem itself. We have already seen that we discover very little about Sa'id ‘Aql's character from his verse, whereas Labaki seems to have put, at least, some of his subjective experiences into his verse.

But this comparative lack of obscurity should not be seen as a fault in Labaki's poetry as it is, in fact, a virtue shared by several French Symbolist poets, notably Verlaine. What we discover from Labaki's poems is a slightly melancholy man with mystic tendencies, who is trying to express his abstract apprehension of the Ideal in terms of concrete imagery, within the framework of Symbolist theories. Perhaps the essential difference between Şalâh Labaki and ‘Aql is their different approaches towards these theories. ‘Aql, as we have seen, tried to implement the French Symbolist theories which he admired so much with limited success, while Labaki studied these concepts and then began to employ them as part of his poetic experimentation with more satisfactory results, so that his poetry is essentially closer to that of the French School, and is more satisfying for his reader.

Poetry in Egypt in the late 1930s had become somewhat uninteresting, trapped as it was between the works of Abū Shādī and the early writers of Apollo, and the creative genius of ‘Alī Maḥmūd Ṭāhā, but one figure

1. Ahamd, ar-Ramz wa-r-Ramziyya, p. 237.
2. See Labaki, p. 38.
stands out in isolation; Bishr Fāris (1907-1963), who has been described as the first poet in Egypt to adopt symbolist ideas.¹

Bishr Fāris had been publishing qaṣā'id in al-Muqtaṭaf from 1934 onwards, but it was not until the late 'thirties and early 'forties that any real attention was paid to his works.² The reason for this is perhaps the fact that the Egyptian literary scene, in spite of the attempts of people like Abū Shādi and the Diwān Group, still tended towards classicism and was more conservative in its outlook than Lebanon, influenced as it was by diverse cultures. But the nature of Fāris' poetry itself worked against him, as it tended to be of an elitist nature and was published intermittently, probably because of the poet's lack of interest in reward and fame, although he appears to have wished to surprise his contemporaries with new forms and expressions.

Fāris based his theories of literature on nineteenth century French Symbolism but, like Labakī, did not sacrifice his own poetic conceptions to their philosophies:

[The Symbolist] is the style to which my pen was driven, and to which my soul took flight after study, deliberation and exertion, even if it was influenced by previous Symbolism, and not least the school which created it.³

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1. Fahmī, Māhir Ḥasan, Taṭawwur ash-Shi‘r al-‘Arabī 1-Ḥadīth ff Mīhr (1900-1950) (Cairo, 1953), p. 201.
2. For details of qaṣā'id published at this time, see Ahmad, ar-Ramz wa-r-Ramziyya, p. 198.
But for him Symbolism is not simply a matter of a particular mode of writing, it is a philosophy by which man can reach the Ideal and understand the actual essence of physical things: "Symbolism does not stop at [simply] symbolising one thing by another, but goes beyond this to discover what is beyond the senses, and to display what is hidden."¹

The only way to transcend the sensible and attain this Ideal is to turn inwards upon the self, delving deep into its hidden secrets and subconscious states, which cannot be "classified or explained"² by the description of external realities, and can only be realised through feeling and intuition. In fact the inspired moment of self-contemplation which leads to the composition of poetry is so transient that the poet must take refuge in symbolist imagery if he wants to convey it to someone else.

Unlike Labaki, who felt that any expressive obscurity was due to the difficulty encountered by the poet "in finding the correct words to express"³ a particular emotion, Bishr Fāris believed that the obscurity lay in the very nature of the experience itself, because no experience is the result of a single impulse: "Everything which is connected with the world of thought while it develops and evolves does not present itself to the intellect in a single impulse, rather must the intellect seek to understand it; and it is in this that its enjoyment lies."⁴ But, in spite of this, the poet should try to avoid obscurity

¹ Quoted from Ahmad, ar-Ramz wa-r-Ramziyya, p. 239. See also p. 240.
² Quoted from Ibid., p. 239.
³ Labaki, p. 36.
⁴ Quoted from Ahmad, ar-Ramz wa-r-Ramziyya, p. 240.
whenever possible, so that the sensitive reader can perceive emotionally the poet's state of mind at the time of composition, even if the same poem seems obscure to the less sympathetic.

Poetry is thus more than words on a page; it is a register of the poet's personal reactions towards Existence and is, therefore, divorced from the mundane activities of the intellect, because his genuine attitudes towards his experience of life lie deep in the subconscious. In this way creativity depends primarily on the poet's ability to discover these feelings with the assistance of his intuition, which aspires to the Ideal before any creative factor acts upon it, and only then upon the intellect, whose function is to perfect the created piece of work.¹

Poetry is thus given a semi-divine status which removes it from the sphere of mundane activities, and so the language employed in normal speech, which is of course connected with mental exercises, is clearly inadequate in expressing spontaneous artistic instincts which aspire continually towards Ideal Beauty. So the poet must mould his diction and language so as to avoid verbosity and exaggeration, and must not indulge in clichés unless he endows them with a new significance.

Fāris was himself blessed with a profound knowledge of the Arabic language which stood him in good stead when it came to writing symbolist poetry, which depends so heavily upon the inherent shades of meaning in every single word and upon the emotional associations which a word evokes in the reader's mind. In fact our poet relied very much on associations, but sought to use such words or ideas in an original way which suited his expression. In the qasīda "Ashbāḥ wa-Addād" he

¹. See Jayyusi, Trends and Movements, p. 511.
makes use of the conventional image of "Aṭlāl ʿad-Dūr", "the traces of an (abandoned) encampment" to facilitate his expression:

The sound of the sparrow in the traces of the [deserted] encampment
Is like the songs of nymphs in the ears of the consumptive;
And the moans of the consumptive among the intoxicated flowers
Is like the warning of Destiny, over a group of the misled. ¹

It is obvious that Fāris is using the classical image for a new reason in this quotation. The image of the sparrow singing in the traces of the deserted camp inclines the educated Arab towards romance, because this is normally the beginning of the nasīb, the "amatory prelude" of the traditional qasīda, but any such inclinations are curtailed by the second half of the second line, in which the delightful images of the melodious notes of the birds and nymphs are starkly contrasted with the "ears of the consumptive", just as his "moans" are juxtaposed to the "intoxicated flowers" of a meadow.

It is also interesting to note the way Fāris has contrasted the mundane and the Ideal here, dividing them between hemistichs rather than connecting them within the same hemistich, or within the same image, as had been the case with Saʿīd ʿAql.² However, this dichotomy

¹. Quoted from Ahmad, ar-Ramz wa-r-Ramziyya, p. 244. It is interesting that the format of this qasīda rhymes every hemistich, rather than simply every line.
². The first hemistich and the second hemistich of each line are contrasted with each other. For example:

مثل أهراج الحور في سماع المصدر
is not typical of all his verse. In the qaṣīda "Ila Fatāt", he employs "vigilant" and "fatigued" within the same hemistich, showing how they are part of the same experience:

Show me, Wuḏūḥ, the wealth of the great leader.
I am aflame with triumph, vigilant but yet fatigued.
The discovery of an ambition is insignificant, and the understanding of defeat has deterred [me].

Here Wuḏūḥ is more than a woman, she is in fact a symbol for the Ideal World to which, according to his theories, the soul of every poet strives, and it is clear that the poet has come near to achieving this aim, but has finally fallen short. This is shown by the passionate request of the first line and by the joyful announcement of "I am aflame with triumph", but both of these are soon negated by the intimation that he is weary even if alert, and that the lustre of victory no longer attracts him because he recognises that both victory and defeat are part of the same experience. This is not stated directly, but by the balancing of "vigilant" and "fatigued", and of "the discovery of an ambition" and "the understanding of defeat". In this way Fāris is exploiting psychological rather than physical connections between things, so that it is internal realities that are contrasted and not external forms or associations.

Similarly he employs concrete imagery to explicate abstract ideas or psychological states, often consolidating it by personification:

1. Quoted from Ahmad, ar-Ramz wa-r-Ramziyya, p. 242.
[Memories] fall upon my wound and melt slowly upon it
So the wound rebels, and suppuration rages in its folds.¹

The "wound" is of course emotional rather than physical, and the personification of the second line, in which the wound "rebels" while the suppurating matter "rages", carries a force which works on two levels simultaneously, the physical and the psychological, so that the reader reacts immediately, sympathising with the poet's mental agony.

Images of death and pain pervade much of Bishr Fāris' verse and are often symbolised by the concept of autumn as the beginning of the death of the year, a symbol widely used by romantics and symbolists alike. In "al-Kharif ff Bīrlīn" the poet uses autumn to signify his own emotional depression:

Pallor clings to the pretty leaves,
The pallor of distress and long separation.
— A joke of illicit autumn.²

Yet autumn is not simply a hackneyed image for death and decay; it is endowed with unusual attributes, it is "illicit" and malignant, because it is depicted as killing the beautiful plants for its own amusement, rather than as an equal partner in the natural progression of seasons. "Pallor" is similarly personified as evil, and is portrayed as if it was a fungus or some other sort of parasite, living off the tree without rendering anything in return. From this personification

¹. Quoted from Ahmad, ar-Ramz wa-r-Ramziyya, p. 245.
². Quoted from Ibid., p. 247.
the poet's emotional attitude towards the long separation which faces him takes on a pernicious aspect, which is drawn partly from the actual language of the quotation, and partly from the imagery enclosed therein.

However not all his experiments are so successful, and they are sometimes laboured and taut:

Yearning has become bored with the clamour of the senses, and has raised its glance to the horizon.
The objects of desire have surprised the suns with their embrace.¹

Here his intention is still recognisable, but his poems are sometimes totally ambiguous and obscure.² Furthermore, his poetry is sometimes prosaic and affected, to the point of incomprehensibility; while in others the workings of the intellect are easily discerned.³ But, in spite of this and his intermittent failure to achieve complete harmony between emotion and meaning, his poetry does show a definite development, especially as regards his mystical inclinations.

He used these tendencies to his best advantage when trying to show how the Ideal can only be perceived through the sensible and external, as our bodies are always tied to the Mundane, often using šīšt diction to achieve his aim, but, like the ʿālāl, endowing it with a new significance.⁴ When discussing this move from the ordinary to

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1. Quoted from Ahmad, ar-Ramz wa-r-Ramziyya, p. 241.
2. For example see Fahmi, Tajawwur ash-Shiʿr, p. 203-4.
3. For example see Ahmad, ar-Ramz wa-r-Ramziyya, p. 242, third quote.
4. See Ibid., p. 243 for examples.
the Ideal, Fāris often endows his verse with a mood which is at once mystical and calm:

How many mornings has the imagination scaled [its walls and escaped] into space

So its familiar is left alone with an abundance of grace, unsheathed.¹

using words and rhythm to reflect the content of his verse.

It is, however, unfortunate that Fāris' poetry was not published in a collection, but sprinkled among various periodicals and books, so that it was difficult for the literary public to acquaint themselves with his style and with any leitmotifs in his poetry. For his poetry was on the whole uninfluential, because his readers could not understand the meanings hidden beneath the imagery. But the onus for this comparative lack of success does not lie solely on the shoulders of his public, because his poetry was, as we have seen, prone to ambiguity and intellectuality and often lacked the spark of creative genius necessary to inspire a public to wider literary horizons. It is interesting that Fāris' prose plays Mafraq at-Tariq (1938) and Jabhat al-Ghayb (1960) were far more successful than his poetry, whereas 'Aql's verse far surpasses his attempts at drama. Perhaps this is because 'Aql actually possessed the latent creative talent necessary for poetry, although he unfortunately dampened it with his admiration for French Symbolism, whereas Fāris excelled in drama and associative language, while his control of rhythm and rhyme was weak; lyricism is seldom prominent in Bishr Fāris' poems.²

1. Quoted from Ahmad, ar-Ramz wa-Ramziyya, p. 241.
2. See Darwish, ar-Ramziyya, p. 454-5.
However he still played an important part in the introduction of Symbolist principles into Arabic literature, by joining these philosophies with personal semi-mystical spiritual longings to transcend reality to see what lay beyond. Moreover his poetry, based as it is on associations and oblique statement, was compact and stood "in direct contrast with the scores of verbose poems then being written" in Egypt. Yet he still remained an isolated figure outside the main literary trends of his day, and failed to inspire other poets to emulate him, whereas Labaki and ‘Aql were to prove influential in years to come.

**Conclusion**

From this study it is clear that the main thesis of this chapter has been borne out. Although the symbolist poets herein discussed had a limited impact upon their contemporaries or immediate successors, they failed to noticeably influence the major literary trends of their day which continued to be romantic, and remained at a tangent to the development of modern Arabic poetry. In fact the symbolic trend within romantic literature was actually to prove more immediately influential on even the Symbolist school of the 1950s, with its use of mythology, and Christian and Muslim symbols.

Perhaps the fundamental weakness shared by the last three poets discussed, ‘Aql, Labaki and Fāris, was their incomplete assimilation of the profundity and complexity of French Symbolist doctrines, and

2. For further discussion of Fāris' poetic style, see Karam, *Ar-Ramziyya wa-l-Adab*, p. 125-130.
3. See next chapter for details.
their desire to implement foreign literary criteria within the sphere of Arabic poetry. To be successful a literary trend must always grow naturally from its native soil and culture, and Arabic poetry was not yet ready to assimilate symbolist ideas when these poets started to publish their poems and criticism.

Thus, although at first glance symbolism may appear contemporary to romanticism in Arabic poetry, it only gained currency in the 1950s, by which time these poets had been eclipsed by romantics and other symbolists whose poetry was more firmly rooted in the soil of Arab culture. So the poets discussed in this chapter actually fall outside the main corpus of genuinely Arabic symbolism, and were actually the forerunners of Arabic Symbolism, and should perhaps be called "Pre-Symbolists" (after the fashion of Badawi's "Pre-Romantics"), who prepared the way for later Symbolists by introducing Symbolist ideas to the Arabic literary world, and by experimenting with the use of Symbolist diction and evocative language.
Although it has been decided that Sa‘id ‘Aql, Bishr Fāris and Ṣalāḥ Labakī should be termed "Pre-Symbolists" in terms of Arabic symbolist verse, we should not immediately deduce that symbolism as seen in the more genuinely Arabic poetic trend of the 1950s was unknown before this time. Symbolic imagery had naturally been known throughout the history of Arabic poetic culture, but had never constituted a definite, predominant force until the mid-twentieth century. Yet it would be incorrect to claim that no poet writing before the 1950s had composed symbolist poetry comparable to that of the Symbolist poets who dominated the literary scene from the early 1950s onwards, because, as we maintained in the previous chapter, the Mahārī poets of the U. S. A. depended to a greater or lesser degree on certain aspects of symbolist theories, especially their luminary Jibrān Khalīl Jibrān.¹


2. For details of Jibrān’s theories and techniques, see Chapter I. For discussion of symbolic aspects of Mahārī poetry, see Ahmad, ar-Ramz wa-r-Ramziyya, p. 191 ff. As any other Mahārī poets using these techniques were greatly influenced by Jibrān, it is deemed unnecessary to discuss their styles at length here. For details of verse of other Mahārī poets, see also Jayyusi, Trends and Movements, p. 85 ff.; and Diwan Abī Mārī (Beirut, n.d.), p. 24 ff.
While it is true that Jibrân was "a poet in his prose, not in his verse", and that his claim to fame lies rather in his poetic prose than in his poems, there can be no doubt that his literary output generally influenced the poets of two very different eras: that which was pervaded by the negative attributes of Arabic romanticism (1930s and early '40s), and that of the 1950s, when Arabic Symbolism came of age, and developed into a genre rather than a literary curiosity. His romantic tendencies have been previously discussed at length, but his use of symbolism deserves special mention as it was to prove more influential upon the Tammûzi and Symbolist poets of the mid-century than their Pre-Symbolist elders of the 1940s.

Perhaps the reason for this lies in the fact that the pure "Symbolisme" of French literature was very much a product of its own era and literary environment, and was thus extremely ill-suited to being transplanted to any other literary environment, imbued as it was with individualistic impressionism and imagery. Furthermore, it was the product of more than a century of intense literary development, which had seen several differing genres rise and fall. Thus, when the Pre-Symbolists of Arabic literature, with only a few years of development of modern theories behind them, attempted to graft French literary theories on to the long and splendid poetic culture of the Arabs their attempt was doomed to failure.

In view of this it is interesting to note that Jibrân, with his avid interested in European literature and world literature generally, proved so influential as regards Symbolist Arabic verse, when Sa'id 1

1. Quoted from 'Abbûd, Mârûn, Mujaddidûn wa-Mu'tarrûn (Beirut, 1948), in Jayyusi, Trends and Movements, p. 103.
'Aql and his contemporaries only managed to draw the attention of a limited circle of belle-letttrists. Of course, this was partly due to the aristocratic view of literature of a poet like Bishr Fāris, but, as we have seen, 'Aql himself did much to try to promote the cause of Symbolism in Arabic letters but achieved little success. The real reason for Jibrān's success, and 'Aql's comparative failure, probably lies much deeper in the attitude of both poets towards the function of Symbolism itself.

As has already become clear in the previous chapter, 'Aql, like his French mentors, sought to express the intangibility of his experiences and ideals by using sounds and symbols to evoke impressions and meanings suggestively in his audience's consciousness or subconscious. Jibrān, however, used symbolism to clarify his ideas and to furnish his audience with a point of reference, so that they could understand and sympathise more fully with his theme or emotional state. Jibrān's reasons for employing symbolism were thus clearly far closer to those of the Pre-Symbolists.

Another reason perhaps lies in the admiration of Jibrān for the Romantic writers of European literature, and especially Rousseau and Voltaire, rather than for the Symbolists. Indeed Khalīl Hāwī felt that Jibrān's reaction to the Symbolists was probably unfavourable, if not openly hostile. Similarly, however much they may have claimed otherwise, the young Arab poets of the 1940s, who were to become the

1. See previous chapter.
Symbolists of the '50s and '60s, were deeply influenced by the Romantic poets of Europe rather than by the Symbolists, and adopted symbolic techniques from the Romantics and Imagists, especially T. S. Eliot, rather than from the original Symbolist school.¹

Thus, Jibrān, in his desire to evoke a particular sensation or emotion in his reader, resorted to non-pictorial imagery and to the personification of abstracts rather after the fashion of the Romantic School; but used both in a new, but acceptable way, which did not rely upon stock phrases or associations and arose from the poetic sensibilities of the poet himself. For example, the storm or tempest (al-'Aṣīfa) is found throughout Jibrān's poetry and prose as a representation of his frustrations, both emotional and spiritual, so that any reader with the slightest acquaintance with Jibrān's literature immediately associates the word with some sort of search, and, especially in al-‘Awāṣif (1920), with Jibrān's quest for knowledge and mystical Union with Universal Unity.²

Jibrān's most important leitmotifs are, however, the Forest (al-Chāb), night (al-Layl) and the Sea (al-Bahr), which retain their significance throughout his career, while Lebanon, like Jaykūr in the poetry of as-Sayyāb, although originally a geographic entity, soon becomes a metaphysical homeland for Jibrān, and a symbol for a plane in which all opposites are reconciled, and all conflicts ceased; an abode of total peace and tranquility.³

¹ Adūnīs, whose verse later developed marked Surrealist tendencies, is a notable exception.
² For description of contents see Naimy, Nadeem, "The Mind and Thought of Khalīl Gibran", J.A.L. (1974), p. 6o-1. This is, however, true of most instances of Jibrān's use of 'Aṣīfa.
³ See Ibid., p. 59.
The Forest was, of course, a common motif among Arab romantic poets, for whom it was a refuge, where the poet could rest in peace far from the harassment and evils of metropolitan existence. Jibrān is, to a certain extent, typical of the romantics in this aspect and there is ample proof, even in al-Mawākib (1919), to substantiate such a claim. However, although al-Ǧāb might be a symbol for simplicity, and hark back "to a pristine and pre-lapsarian state of innocence"¹, it also has wider, and more metaphysical connotations. This is especially clear in al-Mawākib in the poem "Sawṭān", in which Jibrān appears at first glance to long to return to al-Ǧāb and thus escape from the harsh realities of life:

Life should be [passed in] the Forest, and were the days gathered together in my hand, I would go and scatter them in the Forest.

but the deeper significance soon becomes clear, because he recognises that such an escape is in fact impossible:

But Fate does what it wills with me, and whenever I long for the Forest, it prevents me with excuses;

For the Fates have means which do not change, and men fall short of their aims through impotence.²

This poem actually deals with the transience of life, and the problems of the soul, which knows Beauty but is nevertheless tied to this world, and with man's insignificance when compared to the eternal laws of the Universe. In this way the Forest is no longer an escape, but becomes a symbol for the poet's yearning for unity and the resolution of conflicts, and for the conquest of dualism: that of the body and the soul; of good and evil; and of life and death. Instead of being a negative symbol for mere escapism it has become a positive one for a life "free from delusion and hypocrisy; based on justice, love, beauty and happiness, and, before all else, upon brotherhood."²

It is also, of course, a sign of Jibrān's metaphysical union with Nature in his verse, in which he identifies all that is pure or good with Natural imagery, while imagery connected in any way with man usually elucidates evil or negative characteristics, such as pain, dislike or alienation.³ Indeed we often find his three major motifs, night, the sea and the Forest, together in a poem, as is the case in "Sawtān":

For the silence of the night is a Sea, whose waves [sound]
in your ears,
And there is a heart in the breast of the night, which
beats where you sleep.⁴

1. The poetry of the Mahjar is generally imbued with conflict between angels and devils, or the soul and the body. See Dayf, Dirāsāt, p. 187.
2. Ahmad, ar-Ramā wa-r-Ramziyya, p. 190.
3. For discussion see Naimy, al-Shirbāl, p. 231.
Here the definite link between the "sea" and "night" in Jibrān's mind is clear for all to see, and both act as a symbol for the poet's contemplation of his deeper self, for his quest for self-knowledge. However the symbolic weight of the simile lies on "night" rather than on the "sea", which is used to convey an atmosphere of peace to the reader, intimating that the poet's meditations are not, on this occasion, fraught with conflict and frustration. Also, while the sea stands for the poet's lone search for understanding, as in Damʿa wa-Ibtisām (1914), in the poem "A Lover's Call":

Where are you now, my other self? Are you awake in The Silence of the night?¹

This is also true of al-ʿAwāṣif, when Jibrān cries out, "I am like you, 0 Night" and continues to say, "For there is no beginning to my shadows, and no end to my depths."² In the last quotation, the connection between the sea and night is not stated explicitly, but the comparison is obvious, although the adjectival diction is equally valid for both. Jibrān is aware that his soul is mysterious like the night and as limitless as the sea, as he seeks to plumb the depths of his subconscious and of his metaphysical beliefs, and continually discovers that secrets remain hidden from him no matter how much he exerts himself in his quest.

The sea (al-bahr) is thus clearly being used to describe the vastness and profundity of Jibrān's mystical longings and meditations,

2. Quoted from al-Ghirbāl, p. 230.
but it performs other functions as well. Although it carries the common poetic associations of division between two lovers:

Where are you my beloved? Do you hear my weeping
From beyond the ocean?

and of Peace:

Let me sail in the ocean of
My dreams; until . . . Tomorrow

it is also a symbol for love, beauty, and Unity and is often used to symbolise the peace and harmony of Eternal rest, as in "The Life of Love":

How deep and wide will be the ocean of Slumber
And how recent was the dawn?

Perhaps this is nowhere more finely executed than in his foreword to Tears and Laughter, in which he expands the image to include other aspects of the natural cycle of water. Here the Sea becomes a symbol for the soul's Union with the Eternal Source of all Existence, with God, while rain is the weeping of water as it falls inland, far from its mother sea:

1. Tears and Laughter, p. 93 and p. 86 resp.
2. Ibid., p. 14. The "brooks" are used throughout this poem to mark the seasons: see p. 10-14.
The water disappears and ascends until it turns into clouds that gather upon the hills and valleys; and when it meets the breeze, it falls down upon the fields and joins the brook that sings its way towards the sea . . .

Thus the spirit separates itself from the body and walks into the world of substance, passing like clouds over the valleys of sorrow and mountains of happiness until it meets the breeze of death and returns to its starting place, the endless ocean of love and beauty which is God.¹

This extract exemplifies Jibrân's use of the sea in many poems to symbolise his mystical belief in the oneness of all Existence, and, indeed, his belief in the cyclic path of the soul from incarnation to incarnation, while the stream which "sings its way towards the sea" is a symbol for the soul's longing to return to the Universal Soul, before it is again reborn and turned into "clouds that gather upon the hills and valleys" of happiness and sorrow.²

In all these examples Jibrân is lending a significance to his motifs which actually involve associations beyond their common usage, and are often part of a complex structure of imagery which relies on

¹. Foreword, Tears and Laughter.
². For an interesting discussion of Jibrân's philosophical ideas, see Naimy, Nadeem, op. cit. Jibrân also used the sea's ceaseless love for the shore to symbolise the soul's attempts to show man the riches of life beyond the Mundane: "Song of the Wave", Tears and Laughter, p. 17-19.
emotional rather than pictorial response. To enhance this expression he often resorted to repetition and rhythmic incantations, moulding his diction and rhyme to suit his purpose, as did the romantic poets of his native East, the Pre-Symbolists and the Symbolists. Similarly he employed tajsid, expressing abstract emotions through concrete images, as in the Foreword to Tears and Laughter, and personification, both of which are important tools in the hands of the Pre-Symbolists, and the Symbolists, as shall become obvious in the course of this study.

However Jibrān seldom used some of the other techniques of Symbolist poetry1, so that we hardly ever find him involving more than one sense in a single image, although he does sometimes interchange the sensual and the non-sensual within a single idea. Nor does he use colours to denote abstract conditions or psychological states beyond the normal associations of Romantic verse, unlike the Pre-Symbolists and Symbolists, both of whom employed colours in startling, and often perplexing images which deny any logical explanation but appeal immediately to the senses, suggestively conveying the poet's intention to his reader.

We must thus conclude that, while Jibrān's verse contains many symbolic aspects which are similar to those of the Arabic Symbolism of

1. A particularly good example of personification can be found in "The Life of Love" (Tears and Laughter, p. 10-14) in the section concerning "Spring":

    the brooks burst out in dance
    Between the rocks, repeating the song of joy.

For discussion of his use of symbolist techniques, see Ahmad, ar-Ramz wa-r-Ramziyya, p. 187 ff.; and Jayyusi, Trends and Movements, p. 101-2.
the '50s and '60s, and exerted some influence on the latter, his poetry and prose remained mostly within the general confines of romanticism. But those symbolic techniques which he employed must, nevertheless, be given their proper place in any discussion of Arabic Symbolism, especially his use of particular imagery and the Leitmotif, and his symbolic use of Biblical and Islamic imagery and of mythology, which shall be discussed in the appropriate section of this chapter.

The Symbolist genre came to the main corpus of Arabic literature at a time when the verse of the Pre-Symbolists was already losing its freshness and impetus. However, this Symbolism did not develop directly out of Pre-Symbolism, but grew naturally out of the previous romantic atmosphere of Arabic poetry, which, in spite of its growing irrelevance to contemporary affairs, had helped to render Arabic letters capable of successfully employing the intricate devices of symbolist verse.

Relying as it does on the evocative power of words and images to express subjective attitudes or emotions, romanticism had necessitated certain changes in diction and expression, as we have seen in a previous chapter\(^1\), but the poets of this era seldom employed symbolism as manifested in either the poetry of the French School or the works of the Pre-Symbolists. In fact these romantic poets used symbols to express their themes or emotions more forcefully, rather than to uncover some deeper reality, some Ideal Beauty thereby, as had the Pre-Symbolists who sought to make their point by means of oblique, linguistic and evocative use of words or images. For this reason they

\(^{1}\) See Chapters I and II.
seldom exploited some of the actual tools of Symbolism in their verse, such as the interchange of the senses and the mixing of sensual and abstract in their images, although they occasionally used colours symbolically.

It was, perhaps, the differing intentions of these two "schools" that led to their differing styles, although both were influenced by European literature, and were more or less contemporary to each other. So, while Sa‘īd ‘Aql was trying to introduce a cult of aestheticism into Arabic verse and prose and seeking to write poetry after the style of French Symbolism, ‘Alī Māhmūd Tāhā and Abū Shabaka were seeking to express their attitudes to the Universe in original phrases and images which would reproduce a certain psychological state or mood in the minds of their readers.¹

For this reason ‘Alī Māhmūd Tāhā used the idol in his poem "at-Timthāl"² to clarify his sense of disappointment and frustration indirectly, while Abū Shabaka, in his long poetic narrative Ghalwā, expressed himself through many symbols and even symbolised the two sides of woman's personality, the innocent and the sensual, by means of two separate human beings, Ghalwā and her cousin Warda.³ However their symbolism is basically thematic as both poets symbolise an idea or theme at the outset, and then continue to elaborate and explain it. They are thus, like most Arab romantic poets⁴, relying on symbols to

1. See Chapter II for details.
2. See Diwān Ta, p. 313 ff.. For discussion of Tāhā’s use of symbolism, see Ahmad, ar-Ramz wa-r-Ramziyya, p. 258 ff.. For more details concerning "at-Timthāl", see Chapter II.
3. For discussion, see Chapter II, and M.A.P., p. 147 ff..
4. For more detailed discussion see Ahmad, ar-Ramz wa-r-Ramziyya, p. 194 ff. in which he pays particular attention to the poets of Apollo. For Nājī, see Ibid., p. 262-4.
interpret a certain mood or thought rather than seeking to express themselves in symbolist verse.

In this they were, like Jibrān, closer to the Symbolists of the mid-century who, as we shall see later, also used symbolism to express a fact or attitude without resorting to the classical modes of direct statement. It is therefore only fair that Mandūr should have bestowed this acclaim upon them: "For [Apollo] was the group who can fittingly be said to have greatly revived poetic expression in modern Arabic literature, by employing what the West calls 'expressive symbolism'"¹ especially as other critics have judged them harshly for not adhering to the rules of French Symbolism when composing symbolic verse.²

The days of romanticism as known in the poetry of the Apollo group were, however, numbered. Although the negative romanticism of Arabic verse had had its own significance in its time and, in spite of its subjective emphasis on the individual, retained at least tenuous links with reality, the years immediately after the Second World War demanded a more realistic and less idealistic type of literature, and romanticism is, by its very nature, more suited to lyricism than realism. In addition the Arabic language had become limp and imprecise at the hands of the less gifted romantic poets, who lacked the instinctive semantic intuition of Tāhā, ash-Shābbī, Nājī or Abū Shabaka, and was thus ill-suited to express the tension and complexity of modern Arab experience. The reaction against this often escapist type of literature was inevitable in view of the political

1. Mandūr, "at-Ta‘bīr ash-Shi‘rī", p. 98.
2. See for example, Karam, ar-Ramziyya wa-l-Adab, p. 180, in which Tāhā is attacked for just this reason.
events of the day, and their psychological or social side-effects, and, having been first felt in Egypt, the shock-waves produced in literature by these external circumstances were soon being registered throughout the Arab-speaking world.

While the Westerner may be forgiven for seeing poetry as an impotent force in political or social life, the case of Arabic poetry is quite different because Arabic verse has continued to be a force to be reckoned with from the days of the Jāhiliyya until the present day. Thus the public turned towards the poets after World War II, and especially after the Palestine War of 1948, expecting them to express their frustration and anger at both the Imperialist powers of the West and the inefficient and corrupt leaders of their own countries. In fact Jabrā Ibrāhīm Jabrā was not exaggerating when he said, "Poetry might be condemned as too weak a toy against guns, but in actual fact it was often as good as dynamite. It gave point to a whole nation's suffering and wrath."¹

Calls for commitment (iltizām)² had, of course, been heard in Arabic literary circles for many years, and a man of no lesser standing than Salāmā Mūsā (1837-1958) had even established a review called Al-Majalla al-Jadīda (1929-30 and 1934-42) expressly to sponsor the idea of a literature which not only reflected social realities, but also sought to improve and change it.³ But the debate really began in the 1950s, when literature practically had to be committed to be

3. For further details of the calls for committed literature, see M.A.P., p. 205 ff.
accepted, although some poets, notably Nāzik al-Malāʿika (b. 1923) and ʿAlāʾ ʿAbd as-Ṣabūr (b. 1931), never succeeded in casting away the mantle of subjectivity completely.

For the Arabs especially the early '50s was a time of frustration and complex emotions, and it is hardly surprising that the Palestine crisis led to literary, as well as political ferment in most Arab states. It was a time for commitment of one sort or another, and the Arab poets rallied to its call.

Their commitment was, naturally, to more than one cause and was manifested in different ways. Some poets, like Khalil ʿHāwī (b. 1925) were devoted to Arab Nationalism, whereas Yūsuf al-Khāl (b. 1917), while writing poetry according to the beliefs of a hopeful Christian who sees final salvation at the end of suffering, supported Lebanese Nationalism, and Adūnīs (b. 1930) called for Syrian Nationalism at an earlier stage of his literary career. Some poets and udābāʾ, like al-Bayyātī (b. 1926), were totally committed to Marxism or to Communism, which had first made its mark during the war, and filled their poems with its ideals and with somewhat idealised descriptions of the suffering masses who would eventually rise against tyranny and oppression and prevail. Many of these poets were even willing to

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1. For criticism of their styles see Ahmad, ar-Ramz wa-r-Ramziyya, p. 270 ff., and p. 278 ff., resp. Both poets tended to be more involved with their reaction to the world than in the world itself.
2. For details see M.A.P., p. 209. For discussion concerning the ideological trends of this era in poetry, see M. A. Poetry, p. 267-88.
suffer imprisonment or exile for their political beliefs.\(^1\) Others, however, like al-Ḥaydarī or as-Sayyāb\(^2\), spread their horizons to more general commitment and wrote verse according to the dictates of social realism, describing the situation of their nation realistically and expressing a desire for a better way of life and society for their own people, and indeed for all mankind.

Yet whatever their political or social inclinations might be, the progressive poets all identified themselves with the oppressed, persecuted and suffering, either because it was fashionable or, more usually, because of the prevalent feeling of frustration which pervaded the Arab world at this time, which the poets felt they should alleviate by promoting a literature which would encourage people to reject evil and to struggle against all its manifestations in society.

Thus while "platform poetry"\(^3\) tended to be patriotic and aimed against external enemies, and lyrical love poems continued to be read in private salons, the poets of the avant-garde turned their attacks upon the enemies without, and upon those within their own milieu, who stood in the way of progress or freedom. For this reason their poetry

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1. For details of al-Bayyātī's commitment and its influence upon the style and content of his verse, see *K.A.P.*, p. 210 ff.. Al-Bayyātī is generally regarded as one of the most committed poets of modern Arabic verse.

2. For discussion of al-Ḥaydarī's commitment in verse, see 'Abbās, 'Abbās, *Marāyā 'Alā t-Tāriq* (Baghdad, n.d.), p. 75. For as-Sayyāb, see Chapter III.

3. Poetry intended to be read at public performances, which was usually written within the classical conventions of Arabic verse, employing the traditional tools thereof. For details, see Jayyusi, *Trends and Movements*, p. 584-5.
has been variously described as poetry of qalaq (unrest), shurba (alienation), ṭafṣī (rejection), tamazzug (disintegration) or ḍāyā' (purposelessness), but all these terms are used to describe a type of literature which differed totally from that of the previous generation. Their rejection was positive, because they identified those elements of society which dismayed them, and called for alternatives, whereas the romantic poets had not suggested any alternative other than escapism. Similarly they perceived the alienation and lack of purpose or harmony in their society and tried to encourage more purposeful and co-ordinated attitudes. In fact these poets were retreating consciously from the introversion of their romantic contemporaries, and the aesthetic veneration of the Pre-Symbolists, and were introducing more positive values into Arabic verse.

To facilitate their poetic expression many of these poets turned to ash-shi'r al-hurr (free verse), while some even ventured to use the qasìdat an-nathr (prose poem), such as al-Khāl and Adūnīs. But this was only a superficial sign of much deeper transformations in poetry and critical theories. Indeed al-Bayyātī's claim that "innovations in poetry are not [a sign of] a rebellion against metres, prosody and rhyme, as some seem to think, but rather of a revolution in expression" is probably truer of this era than of any other in the

1. See Jayyusi, Trends and Movements, p. 641; see also M.A.P., p. 231.
2. See M.A.P., p. 227; and M. A. Poetry, p. 304 ff. Ash-Shi'r al-hurr was in fact so dynamic that even the conventional foundations of platform poetry were shaken by its onslaught; see Jayyusi, Trends and Movements, p. 594.
history of Arabic literature, because the majority of famous poets started to write about certain themes or subjects at approximately the same time. From this certain patterns began to appear, as poets turned their attention to bear upon freedom and national salvation, and the need for the Arabs to shake off the lethargy of previous subject generations, and make sacrifices, however painful, to achieve more freedom and self-respect. Thus the basic atmosphere of poetry underwent a fundamental change so that exile is seldom chosen by the poet and is often factual, whether spiritual and caused by unjust governments restricting freedom of speech and belief, or physical, because of persecution or fear thereof. Similarly, death is either a means to final redemption or is inflicted upon the innocent by the tyrannical, or upon the oppressor by the oppressed rising against injustice and calling for reform and a better world.

Such aims are clearly, if not revolutionary, reformatory and often led the poets into open opposition to their respective rulers, which in turn led to political pressure being brought to bear on them, and even persecution. For this reason poets like al-Bayyātī or as-Sayyāb had to flee their countries, and live in exile for months or years at a time, while many Palestinian poets found themselves permanently

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1. See also Jayyusi, Trends and Movements, p. 658.
2. See Khouri and Algar, Anthology, p. 226-7, and "Marthiyat ash-Shuhadā" by al-Jayyūsī, p. 206-9; and see "Qasīda ilā l-'Irāq ath-Thā'ir" by as-Sayyāb, Divān, I, p. 409, resp.
4. For example see Khouri and Algar, Anthology, p. 224-9 ("FI Bawādī n-Nafy"), by Jabrā Ibrāhīm Jabrā.
excluded from their homeland because of their political or national ideals and influential position in society.¹

It is therefore hardly surprising that these poets looked for ways in which they could express their dissatisfaction and opposition through their poetry, without drawing undue attention from the authorities. To do so they resorted to various oblique methods of expression, such as allusion, songs and proverbs, and to the symbolic use of myth. In fact as-Sayyāb could have been speaking for many of his contemporaries when he announced,

My first motive [in using myths and symbols] was political. When I wanted to resist the royal Saʿīdī régime with poetry I used myths to veil my intentions, for the myrmidons of Nūrī as-Saʿīd understood no myths. I also used them for the same purpose in the régime of Qāsim.²

However the desire to publish ambiguous poetry was but one of the many elements which contributed to a new poetic style, which depended upon suggestive metaphors and symbols, rather than upon the rhetorical or declamatory style of the neo-classicists, who expressed themselves by means of proverbs, comparisons or similes which all too often exhibited the intellectual intentions of the poet. In fact

¹. See for example the last few lines of "an-Nahr wa-l-Mawt" by as-Sayyāb: Diwān, l, p. 453.
some poets, like Ḥāwī, even avoided the simile fanatically\(^1\), while others, like as-Sayyāb, tended to use similes a great deal but handled them masterfully, composing long sections without any comparative trope and then producing several at one time, thus heightening the mood of the poem and emphasising their point.\(^2\)

But such use of simile is not the simple descriptive device of the classical tradition, because its force is emotional and draws its strength from repetition and from the poet’s economical and compact use of words. It was also this desire for conciseness that led the poets of the avant-garde to their sparing use of adjectives and adverbs, as they now depended on harnessing the connotations of each individual word rather than upon the meaning of each phrase. The Romantics, especially Ṭāhā and Abū Shabaka, had, of course, resorted to similar language and had reduced the number of adjectives in their poems, and relied more heavily upon the evocative powers of their diction, as had the Pre-Symbolists, although the nature of their language had differed from that of the Romantics. But neither had achieved the precision of these Symbolist poets who, in their desire to show their modernity "by using a vocabulary liberated from the legacy of the 'Forties'\(^3\), managed to produce poetry whose theme and meaning was distilled to the point where logic was often totally invalid as a measure. While this is true of most of the great poets writing after

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2. See for example, "Madīnat as-Sindibād", *Ḏīwān*, 1, p. 463, and "Unshūdat al-Māṭar", p. 474.
1950, it is particularly true of as-Sayyāb, Ḥāfīz, and Nizār Qabbānī (b. 1923).2

This obliquity was enhanced still further by the way in which they used imagery to objectify even their own emotions and experiences, using it to convey their feelings or ideas without actually stating them. Adūnīs is particularly adept at this and conveys his emotions or themes in symbolic imagery of a very high standard,3 but he is not alone in this as most poets now rely more on symbolic imagery than upon any other poetic device.

These progressive poets also recognised the poetic potential of the use of proverbs, folklore, popular songs and such like in their verse. Adūnīs was especially aware of this, and incorporated many colloquial proverbs in his verse4, as did al-Bayyātī5 and many others, while as-Sayyāb often used songs, especially popular ones, to emphasise a particular mood.6

4. See for example, M. A. Poetry, p. 240. As-Sayyāb also used proverbs and folksongs, but this will be discussed in a more appropriate place later in this chapter.
5. For example, see "Suq al-Qarya", in Diwān al-Bayyātī, vol. II, p. 5, which contains many proverbs and colloquialisms. For discussion of use of proverbs at this time, see Jayyusi, Trends and Movements, p. 714.
6. See al-Mūmīs al-ʿAmyā and "Marthiya Jayhūr"; Diwān, 1, p. 509 and p. 403 resp. All these elements will be discussed at greater length later in the chapter.
They also discovered that the use of popular traditions could add to the impact of their poetry upon their audience, an idea which was in accordance with the ideological inclinations of certain poets, like al-Bayyātī, who felt that poetry should be written for the people and by the people. Thus Qabbānī uses the Syrian tradition of visiting the tombs of saints to ask them to grant some wish in Khubz wa-Hashīsh wa-Qamar, while al-Jayyūsī used a Lebanese funeral verse in another poem to intensify the mood therein.

The use of folktales, popular songs and proverbs is of course a form of allusion and this device became very popular amongst progressive poets after 1950. In fact it would be extremely difficult to find a poet who did not employ at least one of these tools in his poetry, although not many used them as often as al-Bayyātī, whose diwān Abārīq Muhashshama probably contains "the greatest concentration of allusions in modern Arabic poetry." As a perusal of this diwān shows, and indeed the same is true of most poetry written about this time, the allusions are not restricted within Arab traditions, although allusions to classical poetry were more popular with most poets. However those poets who chose to allude to Western or world literature had to be careful not to fall into the mistake of using quotations which were

1. To this end al-Bayyātī even included Communist slogans and other popular rallying calls in his poems, although most critics believe that this detracts from the artistic merit of those poems involved; see M. A. Poetry, p. 244-5, where an example is also quoted from Kāzīm Jawād.
strange to the majority of his audience. Unfortunately as-Sayyāb did not take this into consideration when he composed "Min Ru'yā Fū Kār", in which he included allusions to The Tempest, Lorca and Edith Sitwell, none of which improve the dubious artistic merit of the poem.\(^1\) Biblical allusions had, of course, already been introduced into Arabic poetry by the poets of the Northern Mahjar\(^2\), but they were still fresh and often exciting in their originality in the 1950s and 1960s.\(^3\)

All of these elements discussed above came together to produce a more interesting and original poetic style, but one cannot help but feel that there must have been some catalyst, other than the political situation of most of the Arab states, which caused this new type of poetry to develop in such a short space of time from the limp, romantic verse of the previous decade or more. This catalyst was undoubtedly their discovery of post-Romantic Western literature, and especially the poetry of Eliot, although Lorca, Sitwell, Aragon, Neruda and Rilke also had their part to play.\(^4\)

It was, perhaps, this sudden awareness of Eliot's work that encouraged them to use the "objective correlative"\(^5\) in their poetry, and to link their subjective emotions with external facts, and use the

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1. See Diwān, 1, p. 355.
3. See section on Mythology, in which Biblical allusions have been included because of the close relationship between religious motifs and ancient mythologies in their verse.
4. It is interesting that few of these poets, unlike the Pre-Symbolists, turned to French Symbolist poets, but tended rather to the Imagists and Surrealists; Adūnīs is a notable exception. See M.A.P., p. 231.
latter to express the former obliquely and objectively, rather than trying to convey an emotion descriptively or directly. It was, however, definitely Eliot's influence that re-introduced Eastern myths into Arabic literature, which had discouraged the use of non-Islamic imagery for so many centuries, although Abū Shādī and the Apollo poets had followed the Mahjar and Diwān in calling for the use of mythology in Arabic verse.¹ This is especially true of the poets who are normally called the Tammūzite poets (at-Tammūziyyūn), who employed the Tammūz/Adonis myth² in their verse, often connecting it with Christian symbols or with Christ himself. These poets did not, however, form a proper literary school, but were rather a group of poets employing similar symbols and myths within their own personal ideologies or literary styles. It is thus hardly surprising that their affinities decreased from about 1960 onwards as their individual styles began to mature more fully.

In fact, Eliot's influence was pervasive at this time, and there can be no doubt that the widespread use of allusions to popular songs and colloquial proverbs and sayings mentioned above was a direct result of these poets' new awareness of The Waste Land, which has remained Eliot's most famous work for the great majority of the Arabic literary public, if not for the udabā* or poets themselves. The same is true of

1. See Kirrī, p. 115 and p. 128-9. Their use of myth was however more limited to Greek or Latin sources, and was used in narratives rather than emotively. The Mahjar, of course, tended more towards Christian symbols than actual myths.
2. See Pears Encyclopaedia, index. The name was originally coined by Jabrā Ibrāhīm Jabrā who, with as-Sayyāb, Adūnīs, Ḥāwī and al-Khāl, formed this "school". See Jayyusi, Trends and Movements, p. 732.
their use of the interior monologue\(^1\), which was practically unknown in Arabic poetry before this time.

Many observations have been made concerning Eliot’s deep influence upon the development of Arabic poetry but few have been as simple, or as accurate, as that of Jabrā Ḫibrām Jabrā, when he explained,

\[\text{T. S. Eliot was a profound influence upon Arabic verse] because it happened that the people who read him most and translated him and commented on his works were themselves the leading young writers and poets of the new generation.}^2\]

The number of allusions to Eliot’s poetry in the verse of these poets\(^3\) reveal just how influential Eliot in fact was upon the development of the poetic styles of these young poets and their contemporaries; "it filtered down through the works of four or five major poets and spread like wildfire."\(^4\) Clearly Eliot’s influence was the spark needed to ensure the development of the type of poetry dealt with in this discussion, just as it proved the necessary impetus in developing as-Sayyāb’s masterfully concise, yet expressive style, as exhibited in the verse written during the last fourteen years of his life.

Another formative influence was that of the two great literary magazines of this era, Shi’r (1957-64 and 1967-69) and al-Adāb (1953 --),

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1. See Dīwān, 1, p. 47.
both of which were published in Beirut. When the latter was first published in January 1953 by Suhayl Idrīs, it quickly established itself as an interesting and progressive magazine devoted to the cause of Arab nationalism, committed literature, free verse, and progressive theories and ideas generally. However, it was unable to maintain its original high standards and was forced, perhaps for the sake of variety, to accept contributions from less gifted critics, which often led to sensationalism or fanaticism which marred the brilliant contribution made by this periodical in the '50s, although it continued as an important literary force.

Whereas al-ʿAdāb had sought to be eclectic, in spite of its obvious bias towards certain ideas and style, Shiʿr, which was established by Yusuf al-Khāl, was more élitist and strove to be fair and enlightened towards all the diverse aesthetic concepts of its era. It also tried to exclude hasty judgements or fanaticism, and to embrace all literatures so that most of its volumes include translations from other literatures, or critical essays on a foreign poem, novel or short story, while some issues were practically devoted to translations. Shiʿr, in fact, proved not only more professional but also more influential than al-ʿAdāb, because the contributors were more interested in evaluating and defining the new poetic trends than in stating them, as was often the case with al-ʿAdāb, and less interested in promoting

1. For list of literary periodicals published at this time, see Jayyusi, Trends and Movements, p. 859-60. For details of Shiʿr and al-ʿAdāb see p. 599-604; and M.A.P., p. 241.
3. See for example Shiʿr (Winter and Spring, 1961; nos. 17 and 18).
"committed literature" or political ideologies. Yet both magazines had their part to play in promoting "ash-Shi' r al-Hadîth" ("new poetry")\(^1\), and learnt something from the other, especially as both periodicals had one essential aim in common: the desire to deal a death-blow to the unrealistic, and often introverted literature of the previous decades, and to encourage new literary talent and new, more effective literary, and especially poetic, styles.

In practice there was actually no clearly defined borderline between the two magazines and many writers chose to contribute to both, although Shi' r was sometimes shunned by less discerning contributors, who felt that its extreme interest in Western literature implied a certain treachery towards national or Arab pride, and perhaps even imperialist inclinations.\(^2\) Fortunately, most poets, whatever their personal ideologies or political beliefs, were more interested in improving Arabic literature, and in presenting man's condition, and especially that of the Arabs, in the modern world.

In fact most of these poets dislike sectarianism in both politics and literature, and have made few claims concerning literary affiliations to anything other than realism or "iltizâm". For them it is not important to be a Symbolist, Surrealist or Imagist, because these words define foreign stylistic elements and vague associations. Paradoxically, Arabic verse, which once concentrated so intensely upon the forms of literature to the exclusion of content has, to a certain extent, turned its back upon its past formalist attitudes and how emphasises content and theme more than the actual literary devices of poetry.

\(^1\) The term originally coined by Yusuf al-Khâl.

Like Western literature it has broken through the restrictive frontiers of poetic schools, so that what would previously have been called Symbolism, Romanticism or Existentialism now mingle freely together in the same poem or literary opus.

There is, however, one interesting point about the sudden maturing of ash-shi‘r al-hadîth still to be discussed, and that is the fact that it was the Iraqi poets who played a central role in the development of this new poetic style, although they had grown up in a milieu dominated by Neo-classical poets, into which romantic ideas were just beginning to penetrate. The reasons for the intense, although belated, literary progress made by Iraqi poets have already been discussed in Chapter III, so it suffices here to point out that these Iraqi poets had the benefits of a good education in classical Arabic language and poetry, and were for this reason more capable of controlling the suggestive values of their language and its poetic devices, and of manipulating its musical elements and the evocative potential of rhythm and rhyme than many of their contemporaries who had for one reason or another paid more attention to European literatures. When this advantage was coupled with the developments which had already been made by other poets in other countries, Arab and otherwise, the result was extremely gifted poetry, and the perusal of any critical work or anthology of modern Arabic verse testifies to the importance of these poets in the promotion and development of ash-shi‘r al-hadîth, and indeed of as-Sayyāb's position as their leader.

1. The most important are al-Bayyāfī, al-Ḥaydarī, Kāṣīm Jawād, Nāzik al-Malā’ika and, of course, as-Sayyāb.
Symbolism in the poetry of as-Sayyāb

Although as-Sayyāb was not a symbolist poet from the outset, his poetry contained the seeds of the style executed so adroitly in *Unshūdat al-Maṭar* from his diwān *Azhār wa-Asāṭīr*, in which he was already depending heavily upon psychological association to build up his images. As-Sayyāb was in fact an instinctive poet and relied, from the beginning of his career, on associative images to convey his thought or emotion; images which are immediate, clear and vivid, and whose impact is often unforgettable:

![Image](https://example.com/image.png)

This quotation, and indeed all as-Sayyāb’s poetry, draws much of its appeal from his fine mastery of language, which enabled him to choose the correct diction, and to lend new associations thereto. Thus the candles left burning on a wedding night are no longer a symbol of happiness and hope, but of the poet’s desire to find his beloved and marry her, so that the candles at another’s wedding are painful, and cause the poet more fear than facing a wolf on a dark night.

1. *Diwan*, 1, p. 28.
However as-Sayyāb's interest in imparting symbolic meanings to his images grew with the 1950s and it is from this time that we must really study his symbolic techniques. Yet it would be dangerous to claim that as-Sayyāb became a symbolist when he composed the poems of Unshūdat al-Maṭar, because he was rather using symbolist techniques to express himself within a wider romantic spectrum, which had matured beyond the negative romanticism of the previous era.

Furthermore, the symbolism employed by as-Sayyāb and many of his contemporaries was expressive rather than truly symbolist, as they sought to use these techniques to explain themselves more clearly and to express their emotions more immediately than would be possible without having recourse to symbols. This is particularly obvious in the poem "Fi l-Maghrib al-‘Arabī", in which as-Sayyāb begins each section with a symbol and then goes on to expand and explain it. In order to elucidate this point it might be helpful to study one section of this poem more closely. The first section begins with the lines:

قرأته اسمي على موجر
هنا، في وهمة السيراء
على آخر جمعة;
على قبر ن.......

1. Romantic implies the individual's expression of personal attitudes towards life, and his desire to express this to his audience so that they can sympathise with the poet's emotions or beliefs. Symbolism, as understood in the West, is based on the doctrine of Art for Art's Sake and gives little attention to the audience's reaction. For discussion of as-Sayyāb's place as a romantic see Chapter III.
The image of a gravestone in the middle of the Sahara, although somewhat perplexing, is hardly surprising, but it is surprising to find the poet himself reading his own name written upon it. The possible connotations of these lines when separated from the rest of the poem are of course endless, but as-Sayyāb then gives us a clue to its significance, when he says that a man reading his own gravestone sees his shadow on the sand like

Here all the symbols, like the ruined minaret, point towards the past glory of the Arabs and of Islam, which has faded and been trodden underfoot by oppression, which has in turn made the people lethargic and despondent:

1. N.B. the emotive use of simile: it is not used to compare but rather to emphasise.
so that they no longer have the ability to fight against tyranny, and thus through strife attain freedom. The motifs of this section, which ends with the following lines:

فيَأْتِيَ اللَّهُ عَلَى النَّارِ
ظَلَّ أَنفُسُهُمْ وَمِنْهُ وَلَوْنَ أَبَرَقُهُ
رِسْمُهُ منَّهُ يَدُ اللَّهِ
وَالكُبْرَىَّ المِهْزَةِ المُسْتَوْقِهَ

are all involved with the glorious, Islamic past of the Arabs: the Ka'ba, Muḥammad, the green colour of Islam, and the minaret, all of which are dilapidated and faded, and only faint reminders of past majesty. The poet repeats these motifs throughout the poem but endows them with a slightly different significance, until the final lines which sum up the message of the whole poem:

وَهَبَّنَا إِلَيْهِ عُجُوزَهُ وَالْأَنْصَارُ
إِنَّ الْهُماَيْنَ

This message is that the Arabs have to unite and fight to regain their past independence and glory, for right is on their side and they must finally prevail, although the cost in human suffering and blood may be high.

1. For all quotations see Diwān, 1, p. 394-6. Abraha was of course the commander who approached Mecca with an elephant during the time of 'Abd al-Muṭṭalib, the grandfather of the Prophet. See E.I.2, vol. I, p. 102-3; and Sīra 105 of the Qurʾān.
2. Diwān, 1, p. 402.
This quick perusal of the first section of "Fi l-Maghrib al-‘Arabī", exemplifies as-Sayyāb’s tendency to make an apparently direct statement and then slowly unravel a symbolic meaning for it. In this case his grave is a symbol for all Arab graves, left untended on the sites of battlefields past and present, and for the imaginary graves of Muḥammad and God, who have been ignored by the oppressors and forgotten by the people but who, if remembered, can help the people to rise and fight towards an inevitable victory.¹

This poem is obviously heavily dependent on religious (i.e., Islamic) symbolism and draws extensively on allusions to God, Jesus, and especially Muḥammad who becomes a symbol of Arab identity, however other poems, such as al-Mūmīs al-‘Amyār,² are not dependent on mythological or historical figures but are obviously symbolic, as we have already seen in Chapter III. This is also true of "Ibn Shahīd", which contains one of the most effective symbolic images of this period of his life:

١. الزَّوجُ مَتَّ عَلَيْهِ مِنْ تِربَةِ لَالَاَنْ فَمْ نَامٌ

This image is symbolic in its associations, because it is intended to reflect the peaceful round of normal life which the martyr would otherwise be enjoying with his family, whereas he is in fact lying dead in some unknown spot, while his child lies dreaming of "graves and blood."

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¹. For further discussion of as-Sayyāb’s tendency to begin an image with a symbol and then to explain this symbol obliquely, see ‘Abṭa, p. 58.
². See Diwān, 1, p. 509 ff.
³. Ibid., p. 198.
Indeed as-Sayyāb often employed aspects of everyday life in his verse to express something beyond its normal significance. In "Iram Dhāt al-‘Imād" he describes an ordinary evening sitting with other children, listening to the tales of his great-grandfather:

This appears in itself to be a simple description of any evening in any Arab village, but the remainder of the poem shows us that as-Sayyāb is actually identifying himself with his great-grandfather, although this is not explicitly stated at any point, and longing to return to those days when the world was simple and full of wonder as far as he was concerned.²

In this poem as-Sayyāb also describes his great-grandfather's fishing expedition:

This, while furnishing the poem with part of the narrative, also lends authenticity to the tale with the mention of Rumayla¹ and of the nets and the wihār, which is a type of cage made of reeds used by the men of the Marshes to hunt fish. The use of the colloquial word for this type of cage is by no means superficial or unnecessary, because as-Sayyāb is trying to make his great-grandfather's speech natural, although written in Fushʿa, and because there is no accurate classical word for such an object.

In fact as-Sayyāb seldom used a colloquial word if the more literary term was equally expressive. This claim is borne out by the fact that as-Sayyāb sometimes felt it necessary to support his use of a colloquial term. In a poem written in 1944 he included the southern Iraqi word "balam", which is the canoe rather like a gondola used in the Marshes and in Basra:

but felt he had to explain why he had decided to use it, saying, "I decided to mention it because the word 'zawraq' does not describe the image as I see it."

Such colloquial words usually have a vital part to play in as-Sayyāb's poems, which another word could not perform. For instance

1. Ar-Rumayla is a region in the Marshes, and the name of what was formerly a small township, but is now a centre for oil production.
2. Diwān, 2, p. 298. It is interesting that he preferred to use "varā" to "nasab", which is the term usually used in Iraq, in this poem. See also Diwān, 1, p. 623.
"natür" is included in one poem because the man who guards the date palm groves around Basra is called this, and it would be false to call him anything else for the sake of remaining closer to the literary language, especially as it is virtually a part of the man's name:

and

It is, however, interesting to note that most of Iraqi colloquial used in as-Sayyāb's works is connected with village life or the countryside, as are all the examples quoted so far. In one poem, however, he used the word "khatīyya", which is used in Iraq and Kuwait with the meaning of "what a pity", to express his feelings of dislike for his state of exile amongst strangers in Kuwait:
But this appears to be exception and other colloquial words, such as kawsaj, shanāshil and darābik (from the same root as the Syrian word dirbakka; and the same as the more colloquial Iraqi dunbuk, pl. danābik), are to be found in descriptions of the countryside or in poems associated with the rif and village life.

As-Sayyāb also used current events to express himself more clearly and to intimate his intention to his reader who was expected to understand, although he often added footnotes to explain more strictly Iraqi events. In one poem he uses Hafṣa, a girl from Mosul who was murdered, as an example to others by supporters of Qāsim's régime, to show how fearless armed struggle can save Iraq from tyranny and oppression. A less obvious example occurs in "al-Ma'bad al-Gharīq", in which the poet alludes to the communist atrocities committed in the north of Iraq in 1959, using the "sickle" to symbolise the communists:

\[
\text{رَهْل بَلَأً أَوَّانٌ بيْرَةً، وَتَسَاوِتُ الأَعْمَارُ} \\
\text{كَزَرَعْ مِنْهُ سَأْوَى سَنْجَلُ.}
\]

1. See Diwān, 1, p. 182 and p. 190; p. 597; and p. 308 and p. 344 resp.
3. As-Sayyāb also used colloquial words for people, such as "Abū l-‘Atīq li-l-Bay‘ī (the rag-and-bone man), Fattāḥ Fal (the fortune-teller), Bayyāf Tūyūr al-Khudayrī (the man in the Marshes who hunt mallard ducks and bring them to the towns to sell them). For details of his use of such terms see al-Baṣrī, p. 48. Places are also used, e.g. Karbala (Diwān, 1, p. 408) and Umm al-Burūm, a cemetery in Basra (Diwān, 1, p. 130).
4. See Diwān, 1, p. 310-11; see also p. 437.
In this nasīda as-Sayyāb reveals his total commitment to his nation and indeed to all the Arabs, because the sunken temple is in fact a symbol for a land which has lost its way and become weak and impotent, in spite of its vast reserve of riches. It is, however, these riches which can raise the temple, and thus the nation, back to its proper place and glory, if not beyond:

\[\text{علم نزور آلهة البحر،}\\
\text{نَمْ نرِمُها لِتَسْلَمُ قَمَةَ الجِبَل!}\]

But as-Sayyāb's symbolic imagery was not restricted to political or social issues, and extends into his more personal affairs, especially during the last few years of his life. In "Shubbāk Waffa'a", for instance, her window becomes a link between life and death, or more accurately between the poet's past and present:

\[\text{وُسْبِاَكَ الْدُّرِّرَ}\\
\text{عَلَى ظُلْمِهِ مَطْبَقٍ،}\\
\text{يُبْدِى كَبِيلٌ بِسَبْرِ الطَّيَارِ}\\
\text{إِلَى الْمُوتَ كَبِيلٌ نَخْوَةُ}\]

2. Ibid., p. 185. For discussion of this poem see as-Sayyāb fi Dhikrā as-Sādisa (Baghdad, 1971), p. 32-6.
3. Diwān, 1, p. 123. This sort of image occurs in more than one poem; see Ibid., p. 601.
The fact that as-Sayyāb did not differentiate between his more political compositions and his more private poems is probably nowhere more evident than in his use of leitmotifs. As we have seen in a previous chapter, as-Sayyāb's imagery is very dependent upon his childhood environment and his youthful memories of alienation in Baghdad, the former involving good, the latter evil. It is thus hardly surprising, especially in view of as-Sayyāb's generally optimistic feelings towards the future of his country, to find that most of his leitmotifs gravitate towards the pastoral. Indeed a study of the recurrent symbols involving different aspects of nature and the countryside alone would require protracted study because there are so many, and is thus outwith the boundaries of this thesis. It is, however, worth mentioning that words like sahr, warde, nahr, nakhīl, ʿushb, burʿum, qamh and such like symbolise peace and fertility, or the loss thereof when juxtaposed to words like thali, jurḥ, qabr, zilāl, ḥajar or galām, which stand for barrenness, lethargy or strife when found alone. Similarly the word tannur (oven) usually involves emptiness and darkness which can be either psychological or physical, while dabāb (or dabāba) normally implies uncertainty or fear.

1. See Diwān, 1, p. 449 ff.
2. These six words usually imply negative factors or tyranny when encountered in his more socially orientated verse; during his illness they more normally imply pain, fear or hopelessness.
Leitmotifs such as these occur again and again even in his earliest works, but there are no archetypal leitmotifs of any importance before the diwan Unshūdat al-Maṭar. This was perhaps partly due to the strong influence of T. S. Eliot upon as-Sayyāb from about 1952 onwards, which is particularly noticeable in his prosody, his use of myths and his representation of Iraq as a waste land awaiting the rain of revolution, but it was also due to the slow maturing of as-Sayyāb's poetic powers, which was obvious in Aṣāfīr (publ. 1950). Eliot might have, and probably did supply the impetus, but it was as-Sayyāb's personal talent which produced the masterful poetry of Unshūdat al-Maṭar.

Although the original idea of using rain as a motif for rebirth is by no means a modern one, Eliot had given it a modern significance in The Waste Land, which grew from the fact that he used it negatively to symbolise the degeneration and disintegration of European society, which needed the rain of new values and reform it was to be born again. Eliot, however, found little comfort or hope in the hollow thunder which rumbled around him and saw it as a sign of further fragmentation, rather than as heralding the long-awaited rains. As-Sayyāb, on the other hand, was aware of the dangers facing his society, but usually found some cause for optimism, even in the midst of despair. In this way both poets used the image of rain to symbolise the fertility of verdant soil, which also symbolises the healthy souls and minds of mankind, when they are struggling for justice and peace, but as-Sayyāb is surer of its outcome than Eliot.

1. See al-Bawākīr, Diwan, 2, p. 95 ff.
2. See Ostle, Studies, p. 70.
3. See Jayyusi, Trends and Movements, p. 724-5 for a discussion of the differences between Eliot and as-Sayyāb's use of this motif.
Thus rain also becomes a symbol for rebellion and eventual salvation, while also containing the paradoxical qualities of fertility or sterility, according to whether the symbol is used within a positive or negative image. The poem "Unshīdat al-Maṭar", for example, contains lines which indicate despair and suffering:

ومنذ ان كنا مسقاً، كانت السماء
تقيم في الشتاء
ويرحّل المطر،
وكل عام - مين يسهم التربة - نجوع
ما إن عام و العراق ليس فيه موع.

but such pain is necessary to bring about rebellion:

ان تعلمين آي خير زيت المطر ؟

and the triumph of freedom and justice, which is in his opinion inevitable:

في كل قطرة من المطر
عمروه و صناعه من أهل الزهر
وكل دمعة من البياوع والإمراء
وكل قطرة تراق من دم العبيد
لي احتمال في انتظار مسم هريود

1. Diwān, 1, p. 479, p. 476 and p. 481 resp.. This poem carries an inner paradox between the gulf (al-Khalij) and rain, as the former is also a source of destruction while rain symbolises hope, although both are essentially the same: see Ibid., p. 480.
But as-Sayyāb is not always so certain in his hope. He begins "Madinat as-Sindibād" with an invocation to the rain, begging it to return life to the land, which has been laid waste by the ravages of the winter of oppression and poverty:

أَرُسْ لِى مَاءً مَّضِيءً
مَضْنٍ وَلَوْهٍ وَهَبْاً
مَضِيءَ الْحَبْرِ
وَاهْدِيْتُ الْبَذْرَاءَ، وَلَنْغَدِيْ خُزَّاءً
وَاحْرُقُ الْبَيْدَارَ الْعَقْيَمُ بِالْبَرَقِ
وَفَيّْرُ الْعَرْقَ
وَانْفُلِ الْشَجْرَ.

However the return of the rain brings further sterility and plague instead of life:

مِنَ الْأَرْيَ حَسِبَ أَنَّ الْحَمْرَاءَ؟
وَخَبَا الْوَاهِيَ فِي الْمَطَرَ؟

so that the poet no longer recognises his city nor the villages, because of the extreme despair and suffering therein:

إِذَا هِذِهِ مَدِينَتِي؟ هَجْرَةُ الْحَبْر
فِيهَا يَخْرُجُ أَحْمَرُ الْحَبْر
يسْلَمُ الْخَلَاب
إِلَى مَهْدٍ هَبُّوْقٍ الصَّعْنَارَ.... وَالْبَيْوْتَ
تَأَلَّفُ مِنْ لَوْهِم، وَفِي الْقَرْارِ تَقْوَت
عَشْتَارُ عَشْشَايِ، لَيْسَ فِي جَبِيمَ زَفْرٌ.
However, whatever as-Sayyāb's predictions or feelings may be in a particular poem, it is clear that he used rain as a symbol of political rebirth and salvation, which could only be achieved through pain and struggle. Such a symbol is, of course, within the classical Arabic tradition in which the life-giving properties of rain are emphasised, but as-Sayyāb was perhaps influenced by non-Arab customs other than The Waste Land as well. There is no doubt that as-Sayyāb had read The Golden Bough, which his friend Jabrā Ibrahim Jabrā translated and published in 1957, and at least one critic has attributed certain aspects of as-Sayyāb's use of the rain motif to various sections of this book.

In his work al-Ustūra fī Shiʿr as-Sayyāb, 'Abd ar-Riḍā 'Alī claims that as-Sayyāb actually drew on an Aborigine cult in which blood is used as part of a rain-invoking ceremony in "Ruʿyā fī ām 1956", in which he used the words "dimā" in exactly the same way as he uses "maṭar" in "Unshūdat al-Maṭar", expecting his reader to connect the two, and recognise that only the shedding of blood can lead to

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4. See p. 163-5.
meaningful rebirth. This inherent connection is borne out by the fact that he ends the first poem with the following lines, which intimate that bloodshed will lead to rain; that is, to the rebirth of his nation:

\[
\text{ولفنني الظلام في الساء،}
\]
\[
\text{فاستميت الساء،}
\]
\[
\text{صحراء، نرف تنبت الزهر؟}
\]
\[
\text{فإنا الدما،}
\]
\[
\text{تتأم المطر.}
\]

It is however dangerous to ascribe as-Sayyāb's use of blood as an image for rain and rebirth to cults like those reported in The Golden Bough, although as-Sayyāb was obviously influenced by what he read about such cultic practices in Frazer's work. This may have encouraged him to forge a link between blood and rain in his poetry, but the very nature of his symbol must also have led him to combine the two, because, as we have already seen, rain was a symbol for rebirth achieved through struggle and suffering which involved bloodshed. But whatever the initial impulse might have been, it became a deep-seated psychological connection, so that his tears and his blood are like rain for him, and all three seem to toll a death knell as he faces death:

1. In the first poem as-Sayyāb repeats "dimā'" three times (Diwān, 1, p. 431-2), just as "maṭar" is repeated thrice in the latter (Ibid., p. 475-81).
2. Ibid., p. 441.
At a personal level rain has become a symbol for his life, which is slowly slipping away from him, just as the rain falls into Buwayb and is lost. Yet rain is more usually a symbol for a better future and eventual salvation in his verse, even if this resurrection sometimes seems too distant and the cost too great.  

Involved as it was with images of fertility rain was often linked with the palms (nakhil) of his beloved Basra in his verse, and with his village Jaykur and the stream Buwayb which runs through it. From his earliest poems Jaykur was a symbol for a peaceful refuge and home, but came increasingly to be a symbol for lost innocence and peace. In the following quotation both aspects of Jaykur are emphasised, as as-Sayyāb remembers the oneness he felt with his home and recognises that these days have passed, never to return:

كان للارض قلب، أهمل به في الارواش، 
في البساتين في كل نهر يروي بينها. 
آه جيكر، هيكور ...
ما الصفي كالاصدود
يسحب النور مثل المناع الكثيل؟  

1. Diwan, 1, p. 456. See also p. 453.
3. Ibid., p. 206.
But Jaykūr was also a microcosm for Iraq, the Arab lands and indeed the whole world, and a symbol for all other Arab villages. So when he announces, "Jaykūr shall be born from my wounds"¹, he means that all Arab states and all oppressed nations shall be born again out of the suffering of their people. But when Jaykūr is deserted in "Jaykūr wa-l-Madīna"², it is a symbol for all depopulated villages, whose inhabitants have left because of poverty and hunger. In this poem Jaykūr is also a beautiful home to which men wish to return, rather like Jibrān’s mature treatment of Lebanon as a spiritual homeland.

Thus Jaykūr is a symbol for the suffering and injustice faced by the people of Iraq, and a microcosm for all Arab villages and states, and in fact for the oppressed world as a whole, in poems like "Tammūz Jaykūr", "Jaykūr Shābāt" and "Jaykūr wa-Ashjār al-Madīna".³ But it is also a personal symbol for as-Sayyāb’s desire to return to the days before illness afflicted him, and for his hopeless search for a cure.

While Buwayb has a part to play in the former of these two tasks, its most prominent role is as a symbol for his private battle against death, which was slowly creeping up on him. Yet these two roles are not irreconcilable, and in the poem "an-Nahr wa-l-Mawt" both aspects appear side by side. In this poem Buwayb is given the power to give new life to the poet:

أدرَدُ لِأَحْوَضَ فِيْكَ أَنْعَ النَّحْر
رَأَيْسُ اللَّهِ يَصِلُ مَلِكٌ فِي الْقِرَار
لَمْ تَمْلِكِ آزَكَةِ العِصَافِيرِ عَلَى السَّحْر

2. Ibid., p. 414 ff..
but, as a source of life, it is also the source to which he must return:

فَأُلْمِرَ عَالَمٌ عَرْبٌ يُمَنَّ الْعِقَابُ،
رَأْبَةُ الْمَلِكِ كَانَ فِيَكَ، تَبَرَّبَ

which is in fact not an isolated idea, as a similar image linking Buwayb and death occurs in "Marhā Ghaylān":

بَاباً ... بَاباً ...
أَنَا قَرَارُ بَوْيْبُ أَرْقِمُ، مِن فَرَاسِحٍ مِن رَسَائِلِ

Although the power to give life and death may at first glance seem paradoxical, it is not in fact so, because as-Sayyāb’s belief in rebirth for the many through the death of the few again asserts itself, so that Buwayb and the blood pulsing round the poet’s body are united, and the poem ends on one of the most powerful notes in modern Arabic poetry:

أَوَّلُ لَوْعَةٌ فِي دِفَارِ الْمُتَّزَرَاءِ
لَأَحْلَلِ اللُّهُ مَعَ الْإِنسانِ
وَابْعَدَ الْحَيَاةَ، عَانِمِيِّ اسْتَمْهَالِ

1. Diwān, 1, p. 454 and p. 455 resp.
2. Ibid., p. 325. Cf. His allusion to The Tempest in "Min Ru`yā Fā Kāy" (Ibid., p. 356):

أَبُوُّ رَأْبُ أمْيَلِ، نَامٌ فِي الْفَرَءَارِ
مِن مَثْلِيِّهِ لَوْلَّتَ يِبْعَعُ الْتَجَارَ

3. Ibid., 1, p. 456.
There are of course many non-mythological leitmotifs in as-Sayyāb's poetry, which symbolise good, fertility and hope, or the opposites evil, sterility, despair and death.¹ This is particularly true later in his life when several places and characters from his past come to symbolise his longing for the more attractive past, mingling with Jaykūr and Buwayb. Perhaps the most famous places are his grandfather's house and Kanzil al-Āqanān², a house built by one of as-Sayyāb's closer ancestors. The characters are mostly lost loves, like Hāla, Labība, Lamī'a and Ibnat al-Chalabi, although his wife Iqbal also appears. But Iqbal's rôle is more objective, and is more involved with the present and with fear for the future of his family than with the past. The most prominent of the lost beloveds was undoubtedly his cousin Wafīqa, who had died in childbirth a few years before as-Sayyāb's illness became critical. Indeed as-Sayyāb devoted many poems to Wafīqa during the last few years of his life, which are in fact some of the most interesting poems of this period.³ In these poems as-Sayyāb successfully combined two different eras of his life, so that the less troubled youth and the man facing a terminal disease face each other:

² See Diwan, 1, p. 143 and p. 277 resp. For details see introduction.
³ See Ibid., p. 117, p. 121 and p. 125 especially.
Clearly Wafiqa is no longer herself but a symbol of the lost days of the past, which were probably not as beautiful as they now appear. But the clever manipulation of the time scale makes it practically impossible to decide exactly which Wafiqa he is thinking of: the girl he knew, or the girl who died. He is in fact contemplating both in the same instance, because the live Wafiqa symbolises his past joys, while the dead Wafiqa stands for his future and for his death, which will again unite the two cousins. In this way the Wafiqa symbol covers three stages of his life: the preferable past, the painful present and the future which he fears.

His children also appear in poems composed at this time of his life, especially Ālā' and Ghaylān, but Ghaylān alone takes on a symbolic significance, symbolising the poet's hope for a better and more just future, and his belief in the continuity of existence:

من أي سَمَسْن جاَءَ دْنْؤُكَ إِيْرَ نَجِمِّ فِي السَّمَاء؟

ينسِل لِلْنَجِمِ المِدْرِيّ، فُيِرْقُ العَمُّ فِي دِمَائِي؟

Indeed Wafiqa, Ghaylān, Jaykūr and Buwayb have become modern literary myths, and became as much a part of the mythological framework

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1. Dīwān, 1, p. 123.
2. For further discussion of the "Wafiqa poems", see "MIN 'SHUBBĀK WAFIQA' ilā 1-Ma‘bad al-Gharīq" by Jabra Ibrāhīm Jabra in Dhikrāh as-Sādisa, p. 21-36.
3. See Dīwān, 1, p. 709.
4. Ibid., p. 327.
of as-Sayyāb's mature verse as the more general Babylonian or Greek myths, which will be discussed in the section on his use of mythology in this chapter.

Leitmotif is, of course, one of the most important aspects of symbolist theories as it encourages the reader to discover the associations of a particular word, and then to apply these associations subconsciously whenever he encounters the word in the poetry of the poet concerned. The connotations of such motifs are naturally endless, because the precise meaning of each phrase can be changed according to the other words and motifs included therein. A good example of this is to be found in as-Sayyāb's use of the word airās (sing. jaras) in the previously quoted poem "an-Nahr wa-l-Mawt", which is undoubtedly one of the best symbolic poems in modern literature. Within the opening section the word airās (bells) carries two different associations. The first is concerned with lost joys and simplicity, and is an image for the rain dropping into Buwayb:

أجراسُ برح ضاع في قرارة البعير
الماء في المزار والعروق في السكجر

while the second symbolises the way his life is slowly slipping away from him, so that every drop of rain seems like a drop of his blood, and the sound made by the rain as it drips into the stream like a death knell:

وتنضحَ الجرارُ إبراساً من المطر
بُثورها يزوي في أبين
"بوبيب"... يا بوبيب!

1. Dīwān, 1, p. 453.
The significance of a particular word does of course change from poet to poet, especially within the Symbolist genre, whose poets rely heavily upon individual and personal motifs, unlike the Romantics who tend to use motifs according to certain predetermined associations: for example al-Chāb would normally imply an idyllic retreat, while al-madīna involves vice and impersonality. While this is also true, to a certain extent, of modern symbolic Arabic verse, as the city has remained a symbol for suffering, poverty and oppression in the work of many modern poets, including as-Sayyāb, al-Malā’ika, al-Bayyātī, and ‘Abd as-Ṣabūr, its opposite is hardly the idealised romanticised Nature of the Romantics; it is the transformed society, in which justice, peace and equality reign. But it is not important that two or more poets may have chosen to use the same word as a leitmotif in their poetry, because the reader can differentiate between the significances involved in the use of each poet’s use of the word, either from the surrounding images or from wider knowledge of his or her verse. In fact the use of leitmotifs is perhaps one of the most obvious aspects of modern poetry, and the reader must understand each poet’s leitmotifs if he is to enjoy the poetry to the full. This is particularly true of as-Sayyāb’s verse.

* * * * * * * *

As-Sayyāb also employed the use of tangible objects to express intangibles and the sensual to express the non-sensual, which is, of course, another symbolist technique. Such methods are obviously useful when the poet wishes to convey some emotional state of some circum-

1. See Chapters I and II.
stance to his reader, without resorting to the classical method of direct statement. As we have seen the Romantics had found it necessary to use personification and *tajsid* to express feelings which might otherwise have been inexpressible, but their actual treatment of *tajsid* was fundamentally different to that of modern poets, whose techniques are closer to those of European literature or the Pre-Symbolists.

An example from as-Sayyāb's poetry will help to clarify this, while also illustrating his own use of *tajsid*. He begins the poem *Haffār al-Qubūr* with a particularly impressive piece of emotional description, which includes a very small amount of pictorial imagery, and contains the following lines:

\[
\text{مَنَّاَبَّ الْخَلْلُ الْبَعِيدُ - يُخْرَجُ الليل السهييمُ}
\]

These two lines alone would suffice to describe the atmosphere of the poem. The first image of the *talal* yawning reflects the lethargic disinterestedness of the character who is later to be portrayed, while the second image of the "pitch-black night" staring from the door and window of a house indicates something of the malignant evil of the grave-digger, the symbol for those who live off others' sorrow and destruction.

In this way as-Sayyāb, and many of his contemporaries, followed Eliot's technique of the "objective correlative", by which seemingly

2. In classical poetry this would be the ruins of a deserted encampment; here it is of an old, decaying house.
unconnected objects are yoked together by the poet, and given a significance beyond themselves, thus expressing the poet's ideas and emotions obliquely, without depending upon any intrusive subjective reference, although the very nature of poetry demands a certain degree of subjectivity.

The influence of Eliot's own use of the "objective correlative" is especially visible in "Ughniya Qadīma", in which he uses parts of the body in describing a scene as if they were independent entities rather than parts of a whole:

\[ \text{في المتجهي المزدحم النائي، في ذات مساء،} \\
\text{وعيني تنظر في كتاب،} \\
\text{في الذوجة، والذوي، والورجل، واللشب:} \]

\[ \text{الساعة تبهر بالمخب.} \]

and in "Fi s-Sūq al-Qadīm", in which his images of mist are reminiscent of "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock":

\[ \text{والنور تمرسر، المصابيح المزائ، في شحوب،} \\
\text{مثل الصباب على الطرز،} \\
\text{من كل عانة عن طريق.} \]

He is, however, using both ideas according to the dictates of his own poetic impulse, and not copying Eliot's technique blindly without any personal feeling for the imagery itself.

1. Dīwān, 1, p. 70.
3. Dīwān, 1, p. 21; see also p. 65.
In fact most of as-Sayyāb's images "are drawn with sensitivity from a myriad of things perceived by the senses or by the mind. They are original for the most part both in themselves and in their allegorical or symbolic usage."¹ But it is only with the collection Unshūdat al-Matar that as-Sayyāb manages to shrug off Eliot's control over him, although traces of his influence remain, especially in his choice of myths. In this diwān as-Sayyāb begins to produce symbolic images which do not depend upon Eliot's verse or upon that of any other poet, although there are allusions to Sitwell and Shakespeare in "Kin Ru'yā Fū' Kāy" and al-Asliha wa-l-Atfal, and indeed to Eliot's use of Shakespearian allusions.²

One of the most obvious results of his use of the "objective correlative" is of course the number of different senses which can take part in the construction of a single image, without destroying the harmony of the whole. In such cases the various different senses combine to complete an image which defies logic totally, yet appeals immediately to the subconscious or to the emotions. There are numerous examples of this in as-Sayyāb's mature verse, but the following quotation will serve as an example:

قرأت هواطر الريح
وروسوسة الظلماء كان وملا بات ينتمب

³ Diwān, 1, p. 164.
As the introduction to this poem tells us, as-Sayyāb is here addressing some Indian guru who had predicted that the world would end on 2nd February 1962, and is discussing how the guru had divined this knowledge. To study these lines more closely, reading is connected with sight, while "wind" is normally associated with sound or touch, while "darkness" is usually concerned with sight, or rather the negation thereof, and "whispering" with the acoustic senses, as is "wailing". The conglomeration of these senses within the image conveys something of the paranormal faculties required to predict the future, while the personification of "wind", and especially of "field" intimate the supernatural atmosphere of such an earth-shattering revelation.

Abstract states or emotion can, of course, also be expressed by using images which depend upon a colour which has been given an unusual significance. Such use of colours obviously depends heavily upon the poet's personality, although it is also partly dependent upon traditional and archetypal associations. In "Iram Dhat al-'Imād", for instance, as-Sayyāb uses black within the classical tradition:

.. ... وریکاد
بعود هبّت ابتدأ
َمَثَّ تغیب الشمس ، عشیّ نورها سوادٌ،
.. اذا مارفع الطرف رآی .. ومارآی ؟

However black can carry a more complex significance in his verse:

1. Dīwān, 1, p. 604-5.
A total contrast is implied in the first line of this quotation, because the black clouds could augur the rain which the land needs so badly, but could also be harbingers of further deprivation and poverty, because the nights are clear and the sleepless populace can count the stars.

Yet a colour image can also work within traditional boundaries, but be used in a very personal way. In a late poem as-Sayyāb uses green to indicate freshness and youth which is by no means an original idea, but he applies it to a letter, so that the image carries an unexpected impact, and absorbs further curative connotations:

In another, politically orientated poem green stands for Islam and the glorious past of the Arabs, and is practically explained within the image itself:

1. Diwān, 1, p. 469. For a further example see Ibid., p. 126.
2. Ibid., p. 707.
3. Ibid., p. 401.
The "al-Ḥamrāʾ" is of course the Alhambra in Granada, but red also symbolises the blood which was spilt in conquering distant lands and must be spilt again if the Arab nations are to become powerful once more. Green, the colour of al-ʿAbbās, is a reminder of Islam which once bound the Arabs together so that they could conquer much of the known world, a feat which they can still perform if they are united in their struggle towards freedom and justice.¹ Such use of colours clearly depends on associations other than the pictorial.

* * * * * * * * *

Like the European Symbolists and Imagists, as-Sayyāb and his contemporaries used literary allusions to express themselves, subtly changing their significance to fit their own mood or theme.² As we have seen as-Sayyāb used allusions to Eliot, Shakespeare and Sitwell in "Ma'īn Ruʿyā Fū Kāy" and al-ʿAsliḥa wa-l-ʿAfālī, and also alluded to Lorca, Cervantes, Keats, Faust and Wordsworth.³ But these allusions generally fell outside the normal acquaintance of all but a few people interested in European literatures, and tended to be superficial additions to his verse rather than part of the actual fibre of these poems, so that one cannot help but perceive the intellectual motives for their inclusion.

In fact his most successful literary allusions are to poems or poets who were extremely well-known in Arabic circles. Thus in "al-Mabgha" he writes:

1. See also Diwān, 1, p. 394 and p. 395; and p. 392.
obviously alluding to 'Alī b. Jahm as-Sāmī's (d. 863) famous line:

But as-Sayyāb is not talking of love, he is talking about the running battles which took place between students and police during a demonstration in Baghdad in 1948, between the area called ar-Ruṣāfa and the al-Ahrār bridge across the Tigris, in which many students were killed or arrested. The significance of the first hemistich is therefore quite different: it is no longer a matter of bewitching eyes, but of rifles pointed at unarmed civilians.

In "Iqāb al-Layl", he alludes to the lines of Ahmad b. Yūsuf al-Manāzī (d. 1045), which have been quoted down the centuries in every Arabic-speaking land:

In this case as-Sayyāb does not however change the significance of the line, nor the traditional image of the dove's call predicting separation,
but he uses it to express a more personal separation, because he is
telling his wife that his death is near and that he must soon leave her:

1 نائحة مطوية بباب الطاقة في تالي تذكر بالفراغ

On one occasion he alludes to two different verses within one
image, when he says:

2 لنشترن هذه الليل مالبغي دعيه اللهم
بناوئك السرير تراب قطت فلك مستباح
يتنامكم ويعولون

In fact he explains these allusions in a footnote, indicating that
"اللأ" refers to al-Ma‘arrif, and quotes his famous bayt:

3 منشئ الوظاية ما أظن أديم ال
آدم أسر الأدنى هذه الأجساد

and his epitaph:

4 هذا بناء أبي عليّ وما بنيت على أحد
both of which are obviously alluded to in his own lines.

Another source of allusion was the Qur'an. As-Sayyab's use of
such allusions has seldom been given its correct place in critical
appraisals of his works, as most critics prefer to concentrate upon
the more strictly literary references (Arabic and otherwise), or his

1. Diwan, 1, p. 717.
2. Ibid., p. 512.
allusions to songs, rather than upon those which echo the Qur’ān. The Qur’ān is, of course, the most accessible book in the Muslim world, and any allusion thereto calls up an immediate response in the minds of most Arabs, and requires no explanation. For this reason any allusion can be easily moulded to emphasise a point, or contrasted to give a paradoxical effect.

However as-Sayyāb sometimes felt that allusions to the Qur’ān required explanation as in al-Mūmirīs al-‘Amyrī, in which he explained that the Qur’ān states that a crow advised Cain on the burial of his brother’s body in verse 31 of Sūrat al-Mā’dīa.

But when handling allusions which drew more directly linguistically upon a Qur’ānic verse, as-Sayyāb seldom felt that an explanation was necessary, as in "Matā Naltani?" in which the lines:

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{وَطَارَتْ بِالرَّجُلَ عَلَى الْبَحَارَ} & \quad \ldots \ldots \ldots \ldots \ldots \\
\text{فيَأْوَى الْوَُيْمَاخَ المَّرْتَنَانَ} & \\
\text{يُشْكَرُونَهَا} & \\
\text{نَشُقُّانَ الْدِّعَاءَ} & \\
\text{أَلَا نِمْنَا} & \\
\text{يَإِلَّهَ الْسَّعَاءَي} & 
\end{align*}
\]

obviously reflect the Qur’ānic verse:

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{وَهُوَ الَّذِي بَسِيرَكَ فِي الْبَرَّ وَالْبَحْرِ} & \\
\text{مَنْ أَكَنتُمْ فِي الْمُلْكِ ؟ وَجَرِّبُوهُ بِهِمْ بِرِجْلِ ثُلُبِهِ} & \\
\text{دَعَا} & \\
\text{اللهُ كَلِمَّينَ لَهَ الدِّينَ لَنَنْجَسَنَا} & \\
\text{مِنْهَذِهِ} & \\
\text{لِكُونَنَا} & \\
\text{سَالِكِيَنَّ.} & 
\end{align*}
\]

1. Diwān, 1, p. 510.
2. For exception see Diwān, 1, p. 598.
3. Ibid., p. 684.
although there is absolutely no direct reference stated, either as a footnote or within the poem itself. 'Abd al-Ḥalīm is in fact probably correct when he claims that such references are deliberate, but indirect because "a more specifically Qur'ānic reference would stamp his lines too strongly with associations other than those he was striving after."¹ As-Sayyāb either knew that these references would occur naturally in his reader's mind, or was perhaps himself using them unconsciously. Whatever the poet's intentions the result was undoubtedly effective, and did much to enhance the poems concerned.²

As-Sayyāb also made allusions to the Bible in his poetry, but these are few as he tended to depend on characters from the Bible, many of whom are also found in the Qur'ān, rather than upon the text itself. However there are some examples, the most obvious of which both concern Cain and Abel:

"قابيل، أين أخون؟ أين أخون؟"

and

"أتانا الموكل، ويكمل باني؟ فان المعبرين
بالآخرين موكلون؟"³

---

1. Ostle, Studies, p. 77.
2. For further examples of as-Sayyāb's Qur'ānic allusions, see 'Abd al-Ḥalīm's article in Ibid., p. 76 ff. This critic is, however, perhaps over-stating the influence of the Qur'ān upon as-Sayyāb when he attributes the poet's omission of verbs like "gāle" before direct speech, as this was also Eliot's method, and such treatment is more common after as-Sayyāb became familiar with Eliot. See Ibid., p. 79.
The former is obviously concerned with Cain's treachery, but the latter has a subtle significance beyond itself, because the informer is also treacherous, as he watches everybody's movements so that he can report against them; unlike Cain he is in a way his brother's keeper.1

Another Biblical allusion is slightly less obvious, although there is definitely a connection with the Biblical verse in which the angels announce the birth of Christ, although as-Sayyāb mixes this reference with the modern Christian custom of ringing church bells on Christmas Day to announce that Christ is born:

أَرْوَى الأَجْرَاسِ "يَأَوْزِرُ، يَاشْرَالُ بِلَبِبٍ وَالمِسْحٍ أَوْلِيَاءٌ " 2

Although Cain and Abel and Christ are also found in the Qur‘ān the similarity of the above examples to the Biblical texts is too obvious to be ignored, and any Qur‘ānic references would be too strained to be acceptable.

Before moving on to sum up on as-Sayyāb's use of the above-mentioned techniques and study his use of mythology, one word must be said about his inclusion of folk songs in his verse. These are perhaps more immediate even than Qur‘ānic references for the Iraqi people, for whom as-Sayyāb was principally writing, and to whom as-Sayyāb felt a passionate commitment.

1. For Biblical references see Genesis, IV, 9.
The most famous of these is probably his allusion to the song which the children of Basra sing when it begins to rain:

\[
\text{مطر مطر حَلَّبَيْنِ} \\
\text{عبَر بنات البَلاَيِّ} \\
\text{مطر مطر نشَاشَا} \\
\text{عبَر بنات البَلاَيِّ}
\]

which he changed into:

\[
\text{يامطرأ ياَهَلَيْنِ} \\
\text{عبَر بنات البَلاَيِّ} \\
\text{يامطرأ ياَشَاشَا} \\
\text{عبَر بنات البَلاَيِّ} \\
\text{ياَمطرأ من دَهَبَ.}
\]

But he also used a less well-known song which is usually sung at weddings in "'Urus fī l-Qarāy", and is called "Ya Nuwwār":

\[
\text{لاَلَّدَوُّ شَيْرٌ وُسَتُّمَتَهَا} \\
\text{لَدًا} \\
\text{لَدًا}
\]

but according to as-Sayyāb the groom does not deserve her, and he asks her if she really wants to marry a man who is virtually a total stranger when he loves her. Such a variation upon the original theme exhibits as-Sayyāb's personal use of allusions to the songs of his native rīf, as does his reference to the song:

1. *Diwān*, 1, p. 599.
2. "Good luck for you deserve her!"
in "Harima l-Mughami", in which he extends the song after the quotation thereof, asking his audience to bless the singer, who is probably the poet, as well:

\[ \text{"بلعيون} \]
\[ \text{سلم عليَّ إذا سررت} \]
\[ \text{أنا وسلم صدقة} \]
\[ \text{هنم المغاني فأرحموه.} \]

Some of his allusions are to more strictly classical songs, although many of those quoted above were originally classical but have been colloquialised. In "Umm al-Burūm" he refers to the song "Yā Rādī l-Īs":

\[ \text{ماي وهم الهيبة صارعاً "يا هادي المعيس"} \]
\[ \text{على ألم مغينها.} \]

1. \text{Diwan}, 1, p. 308. \text{Al-Bagri} chooses the wrong song for this reference, believing it to be "سليم عليَّ إيا سررت" but the text is clearly vocalised as "sallim", and the allusion is closer to the one quoted above: see \text{al-Bagri}, p. 47. For another example see \text{al-Mūmis al-‘Amya} \ (\text{Diwan}, 1, p. 532), to which he adds the footnote:

\[ \text{سلامه با سليمته} \]
\[ \text{نامه عيون الناس گنی [نامه] أيش ونیمه} \]

2. \text{Diwan}, 1, p. 130.
while also alluding to the refrain "Khām wa-Zanbi1 min at-Turāb" in Safar Ayyūb:

اما سبعت هاتف الرواق ؟
" خام و زنابل من التراب
واخر العمر ردى "

Clearly, these allusions, like the more literary allusions, are part of the poem and cannot be removed without the loss of a meaningful part of the poem concerned, and are thus justified because of the myriad associations included in their use, whether it is positive, and strengthens the idea being expressed, or negative and in contrast to the normal significance of the song. Indeed the inclusion of such songs renders the poems more vigorous because it helps the poet to express his feelings or ideas in fewer words than would otherwise be possible. ²

* * * * * * * *

From this discussion it is clear that as-Sayyāb was in fact employing most symbolist techniques from about 1948 onwards. His aim in using them was however fundamentally different to either the Pre-Symbolists or the French school, who believed in Art for Art’s Sake and sought to actually reproduce their emotions or beliefs verbally in their works, without necessarily seeking to express them to their readers. As-Sayyāb, on the other hand, believed that Art should have

1. Diwān, 1, p. 275.
2. For further details of as-Sayyāb's use of folk songs see al-Basrī, p. 47.
a vital part to play in society, and that the poet should seek to communicate his psychological state at the time of composition to his reader by oblique methods, without actually describing his emotion directly. It is thus hardly strange that as-Sayyāb announced that he was not a symbolist in his introduction to his diwan Asāṭīr, because he was in fact employing symbolist techniques within his own romantic framework. In this he was closer to Khalīl Jibrān and the Mahjar, because he, like most of his contemporaries, used symbols or symbolic imagery to render his expression clearer and more comprehensible to his reader, whereas the Pre-Symbolists' poetry was often obscure to the extent that the poet's intention was totally hidden. As we shall now see the same is also true of his use of mythological characters in his mature verse.

* * * * * * * *

The place of myth in poetry

Myth has, of course, had its part to play in European verse since classical times, but was usually employed as the narrative framework for a poem, or as a simile used to emphasise and clarify some direct statement which had already been made. The Romantics, however, sought to change this role slightly, as they viewed myth as something more than a mere story, and believed that such tales were in fact early attempts by man to explain and understand this Existence and his place therein. As a result poets began to see certain mythical characters

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1. See Asāṭīr, p. 7.
2. This does not imply the negative romanticism that had pervaded the previous era. See Chapter III for details.
as archetypes, which could be used to express some deep philosophical truth indirectly, and composed poems which centred upon significant ideals, while also being an expression of the poet's personal attitude. A good example of this type of treatment is Shelley's famous work *Prometheus Unbound*, in which he expresses his belief in man's final perfectability after hard struggle and pain through the character Prometheus.

However lesser romantic poets could not equal or successfully imitate either the philosophical inclinations of Romantics like Shelley, Blake and Wordsworth, nor their poetic genius and, as a result, myth more or less returned to its former state of a mere narrative for half a century, until its symbolic qualities were again discovered by influential belle-lettrists.

This use of myth is probably best exemplified in the works of Joyce, Yeats, and Eliot, who found that they could not express themselves fully without recourse to myth, which they saw as "dramatic or narrative embodiments of a people's perception of the deepest truths." The archetypal and symbolic possibilities of myth are thus immense, because widely-known myths carry their own associations in the reader's mind, so that these connotations do not have to be stated at any point, but adhere to the reader's subconscious mind whenever these myths are encountered.

In this way myth is perfectly suited to symbolic literature and expression, because it can be manipulated according to the poet's theme to convey positive or negative attributes. For example, Adonis is a

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vegetation god whose return heralds the return of fertility and spring, yet he is used in Eliot's *The Waste Land* as a symbol of infertility, which is rendered all the more effective because the idea of Adonis returning to the world without the power to make it green again is far more poignant than even his failure to return.

Such treatment of myth is, of course, fundamentally self-conscious, but is particularly useful when the poet wishes to express some deep-seated belief or emotion in a way which will ensure universal responses. It is therefore closely connected with Eliot's objective correlative, because it seeks to give the poet and the reader a common and fixed touchstone by which the reader can measure his response, and at least apprehend the poet's intention by subconscious or even conscious reference to the myths involved, although the dangers involved in the use of obscure myths are obviously great.

In the case of Arabic literature this problem was particularly acute because, although rich in folklore and classical tales, the Arabs had no truly Arab mythology, which was intelligible to the bulk of the literary public, because such myths had been suppressed from the earliest days of Islam. As a result any Arab poet wishing to include mythical material within the scope of his verse had to introduce them to his audience simultaneously, and this produced an aura of intellectuality and artificiality which impeded the audience's

2. See Handbook to Literature, p. 333-5 for further details concerning the modern literary use of myth.
3. See for example Khouri, Ra'If, Ma'a l-'Arab fî t-Târîkh wa-l-Uṣûra (Beirut, 1963).
enjoyment of the poems concerned. Luckily these poets persevered in their attempts to introduce foreign myths into Arabic literature, and wrote articles encouraging their audience to familiarise themselves with the wealth of mythological literature which was available in Europe and increasingly in the East.

Modern experiments in the use of mythology in Arabic verse

The first poets in the Arab lands to call for constructive experiments in the poetic use of myth were probably al-Māzinī and al-'Aqqād, but their own implementation of myth in their verse unfortunately suffered the same consequences as many of their other critical ideals.¹ In fact myths usually perform a narrative function in the verse of al-'Aqqād and do not become a coherent expression of something more profound, although they are usually more accurate than those found in al-Māzinī's poetry², which are sometimes so imprecise that one cannot help but feel that they have been lifted bodily from a European prototype as Shukrī claimed.³

Similarly the poets of the Apollo group felt that Arabic literature was deficient in its lack of mythology. In his essay al-Adab al-‘Arabī fi l-'Aqr al-Hādir, ash-Shabbī called on poets to adopt any mythical features from other cultures which they felt could assist their poetic expression⁴, while Abū Shādī pointed out that English literature had

1. See Chapter I.
2. For details see 'Alī, al-Uṣūr, p. 29-33 and p. 26-28 resp.
4. See Kirrū, p. 115-117.
benefitted greatly from using Greek and classical myths in his intro-
duction to al-Yanbū', and encouraged Arab poets to follow their example.¹

It is clear from this diwān, and from the diwān Fawq al-'Ubab, that Abū Shādī was determined to acquaint his audience with Roman, Greek and Pharaonic myths, which he tried to reproduce with faithful accuracy in his poems², while also drawing on stories from the Old Testament.³ Indeed it was perhaps this desire to remain as true as possible to the original myth that prevented Abū Shādī from using myth symbolically, because myth remained for the most part essentially narrative in his verse, and never rose to the sphere of social or even subjective comment.

Abū Shādī was not the only poet to fall under the spell of classical, and especially Greek mythology. In his introduction to Arwāh wa-Ashbah 'Alī Khāmūd Tāhā announced, "I fell in love with the magical atmosphere of Greece, and with its intoxicating and beautiful myths . . . and sought to use them as inspiration [in expressing my] feelings and thoughts."⁴ In this poem he uses Thais, Sappho and Orpheus, amongst others, who debate the problems of love and the dualism between the body and the soul. However it soon becomes obvious that Tāhā's knowledge of Greek mythology was in fact limited, and that Tāhā was more interested in discussing the sensual relationships between

¹ al-Yanbū', p. "yā'".
² See Ibid., p. 22, p. 38-40, and p. 87. See also Fawa al-'Ubab, p. 35-7 and p. 78-30; and p. 39-40, p. 42, and p. 44. See also ash-Shu'la, p. 62-6 and p. 46-7.
³ See al-Yanbū', p. 73. The poem in this diwān, "Dānyāl fi Jubb al-Asūd", p. 50-2, is however less accurate as far as the narrative is concerned. See 'Alī, al-Uṣūra, p. 37-8.
⁴ Diwān T., p. 384. Arwāh wa-Ashbah was published in 1942.
men and women than the problems of the carnal body and the spiritual soul. But, in spite of the shortcomings of his use of mythology he contributed something to the progress of myth in Arabic verse, because, unlike Abū Shādī, al-ʿAqqād and al-Māzīnī, he attempted to give a different significance to his mythical characters by endowing them with speech and making them a mouthpiece for some of his own ideas, rather than simply retaining them as stock figures in a particular narrative.

Yet it was Abū Shabaka who really broke away from these previous tendencies to the narrative use of myth. As we have seen Abū Shabaka created a modern myth when he wrote Shalwā' to elucidate his belief that women should be experienced in this world and sensually aware, while retaining something of the innocence of childhood, but he was also equally capable of using ancient myths and stories from the Old Testament to communicate his feelings and ideals to his reader. Predictably most of these myths are used to illustrate the treachery lurking behind the beauty of women. Thus in "Shamshūn" he describes Delilah's beauty and her influence over men in terms of frustrated animals, and links her deceit with that of Deianeira, who unknowingly caused the death of her beloved Heracles, making both Deianeira and Delilah a symbol for the evil which often lurks behind beautiful women at all times and in all lands.

2. For further discussion of his use of mythological characters, see ‘Ali, al-Uṣūr, p. 41-4.
3. See Chapter II.
4. Afā’ī 1-Firdaws, p. 21. See also Chapter II.
5. See Pears Encyclopaedia, p. 147.
While some critics may feel that Abū Shabaka did not take myth to its obvious conclusion and use it to illustrate the tensions and major preoccupations of modern society, and that he was more concerned with "the narrative spirit" of his myths than in relating them to modern reality, we should remember that the introspective symbolic use of myth is no less valid than the more socially orientated. Indeed the very fact that Abū Shabaka used characters like Samson and Delilah, or the city of Sodom, to express his own involvement with a woman who was being unfaithful to her husband and his intense feelings of guilt, shows that he was truly aware of the symbolic possibilities inherent in myth. Such use of myth is of course very similar to as-Sayyāb's use of Job, Sindibād or Ulysses towards the end of his life; and many of as-Sayyāb's poems which include these archetypal figures are viewed as some of the best symbolic poems in modern Arabic literature.

In fact all the above-mentioned experiments had their place in the development of the symbolic use of myth in modern Arabic verse, although those of the Dīwān group, Abū Shāfī and Tāhā were, as we have seen, hardly symbolic in themselves. These poets perhaps failed to appreciate the possibility of using myth to signify something beyond their ancient narrative meanings or to represent the fears and hopes of their own society, because they saw them as stories rather than as archetypal embodiments of certain forces and virtues. It is also possible that some poets actually used them unconsciously when imitating a European poem, as had probably been the case with al-Māzini

1. ‘Allī, al-Uṣūra, p. 35.
2. ‘Afā‘ī l-Firdaws, p. 33.
in "ar-Rā'f 1-Maḥbūd". However they introduced many ancient myths to the Arabic-reading public, who had been virtually ignorant of their existence before or had at best very limited knowledge thereof, and by doing so facilitated later, more symbolic experiments.

This is more obvious in the case of Abū Shabaka, who, as we have seen, used myth to convey his subjective feelings towards women and towards his own carnal desires, which resulted in virulent feelings of sin and religious pain. By using mythological characters and Biblical stories in this way he showed that myths could be manipulated to enable the poet to express his ideas and emotions more obliquely, and indeed more succinctly. But he was not the first to recognise this, as the Mahjarī school had already used characters from the Old and New Testaments, and especially Christ symbolically before him.

In fact Jibrān was probably one of the most influential poets in Arabic poetry as far as symbolism is concerned. As we have already seen, he employed many symbolist techniques in his verse, and he also used many of the myths which were later to become popular amongst the Tammūzī poets and their contemporaries. The most important of these were in fact that of Tammūz and 'Ishtār, who appeared in Dam'a wa-Ibtisām, but he also mentioned Iram, the mythical city in the desert which only appears once every forty years, and made the search for it a symbol for his youth when he identified himself with his great-grandfather who had seen Iram but had fallen asleep and lost it forever.

3. See Jayyusi, Trends and Movements, p. 720-2, for his use of Tammūz and Iram. Naṣīb 'Arīḍa also used Iram, but made it a symbol for an unattainable ideal (same pages).
Yet the most immediate influence on the young poets of the 1950s as regards the symbolic use of myth was neither Jibrān nor Abū Shabaka, but T. S. Eliot's *The Waste Land*, Frazer's *The Golden Bough*, and Jessie Weston's *From Ritual to Romance*. The very fact that Tammūz became one of their favourite myths in fact indicates the extensive influence of the former, because Tammūz is the Sumerian equivalent of Adonis, who was used by Eliot in *The Waste Land*. However these poets soon discovered how to mould this myth to their own requirements, as we shall see in the section on as-Sayyāb. There are in fact two modern uses for myth in modern Arabic verse. Some poets simply use it as an artistic device, as an allegory or as an allusion, while the truly symbolist poet tries to breathe life into his chosen myth, "and to discover some significance therein for society, because myth is not an end in itself, but a method by which we can express something deeper than the myth itself." 

Fortunately for the development of modern Arabic poetry this mythopoeic attitude has prevailed and poets have chosen many diverse myths to express their feelings towards society and towards modern

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4. See Ahmad, ar-Ramz wa-r-Ramziyya, p. 291.

5. This comment was made by al-Bayyāṭī in a debate published in al-Majalla (Dec. 1968), p. 89. The title of the article is Harakat at-Tajriba fī sh-Shi‘r al-‘Arabī l-Hadith (p. 87-93).
life, while one poet, ‘Alī ʿAbd al-Ṣādīq, even chose to adopt a mythical character’s name as his pseudonym, and dubbed himself ʿAdūnīs, a figure much used in his early verse.1 There is, however, no doubt that it was not ʿAdūnīs but ʿAṣya‘īb who was “the most prominent Arab poet to employ myth symbolically”2, and who was to influence both his contemporaries and those who came after him.

**Myth in ʿAṣya‘īb’s verse**

While ʿAṣya‘īb’s use of myth is clearly one of the most obvious symbolic aspects of his verse, this is not the place to carry out an exhaustive study thereof, as this would extend outwith the truly symbolic features of his poetry, and into the realms of comparative literature.3 So only a few of the most important myths will be mentioned in this survey to illustrate the changing nature of ʿAṣya‘īb’s poetic manipulation of myth.

In an interview given in 1963 ʿAṣya‘īb tried to explain his initial reasons for including myths in his poetry and said,

> Perhaps I am the first contemporary Arab poet to begin using myths and make symbols out of them. My first

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3. For a detailed and excellent study of ʿAṣya‘īb’s use of mythology, see ʿAlī, *al-Uṣūra*, which was originally a thesis submitted to Cairo University in 1976, with the same title. For page references to various myths in ʿAṣya‘īb’s poetry, see the addendum to this thesis.
motive in this respect was political. When I wanted to resist the royal Saʿidī régime with poetry, I used myth to veil my intentions, for the myrmidons of Nūrī as-Saʿīd understood no myths. I also used them for the same purpose in the régime of Qāsim.¹

However deficient his understanding of the true nature of myth or of its place in symbolic literature appears to have been from this statement, his actual practice was more mature and, as al-ʿAshūr claimed, "as-Sayyāb was in fact able to change the classical environment of Arabic verse by including myths in his poems."²

Like most modern poets who use myth symbolically in their verse, as-Sayyāb was originally deeply influenced by Eliot, whose Waste Land actually led to the re-introduction of Near Eastern myths into the Arab lands. In 1958 as-Sayyāb wrote a letter in which he mentions Eliot's use of ancient myths to express his attitude towards modern society: "And whoever examines Eliot's poem The Waste Land will discover that he used pagan, eastern myths to express Christian ideas and [his feelings towards] western cultural values."³ Here as-Sayyāb is emphasising the two points which he believed were important in his use of myth. Firstly that myths from any culture, pagan or otherwise, could be used to express the poet's ideals and attitudes, although this unfortunately led him to the use of far-eastern myths and places, which were, and

3. Rasāʾil, p. 83.
indeed are still, incomprehensible to the modern reader, in "Min Ru’vā Fū Kāv" and "al-Ma‘bad al-Ghari‘a".¹

Secondly, he believed that the poet should interest himself in his own society, and in the cultural aspects and crises thereof, although he should always remain independent of sectarian attitudes in his verse.² As-Sayyāb was himself passionately committed to his nation and its future, as is clear from even the most superficial perusal of his verse, and found that he needed to use myth symbolically if he was to express his feelings and ideas satisfactorily. It was in fact "only when he came upon myth as a means to contain his imagery and bend it in a unifying whole that as-Sayyāb attained the most satisfying framework for his poetry."³

While it is true that "myth is the most important feature of western influence upon as-Sayyāb's verse"⁴, as-Sayyāb quickly moulded it to suit his own expression, and his own Arab environment. Thus although we know that as-Sayyāb had at least read the volume of The Golden Bough which discusses Adonis, Osiris and Attis in Jabrā Ibrāhīm Jabrā’s Arabic translation⁵, and was obviously influenced by Eliot’s use of the Adonis/Tammūz myth which perhaps prompted him to consult the former, his treatment of this and other vegetation myths developed according to the dictates of his own poetic sensibilities.

1. See Diwān, 1, p. 355, and p. 176 resp.. See especially p. 179, and p. 182-3, in which the myths are more like erudite references.
2. See section on critical ideals in Chapter III.
As we have already seen as-Sayyāb used rain as an archetypal leitmotif for fertility and for political and cultural rebirth, and alluded to fertility rituals rather than the mythical characters themselves in poems like "Unshādat al-Māṭar". This leads one to the conclusion that Eliot's most immediate influence was in these areas and in the more formalistic aspects of poetic composition, rather than in the more strictly mythological sphere, and that as-Sayyāb’s truly symbolic use of Tammūz was actually a result of a certain period of contemplation upon Adonis' place in The Waste Land, and upon the information gleaned from The Golden Bough.

It seems in fact that Edith Sitwell was a more profound influence upon as-Sayyāb’s early use of mythological symbolism. Perhaps this was because the interests of the two poets were very similar before 1958, when as-Sayyāb was more interested in humanistic themes, such as the peril confronting mankind because of the invention of the atom bomb discussed in "Min Ru’yā Fū Kāy", the position of children in a world torn by war and the materialism of the men who make a living out of other people’s suffering, which were symbolised by the grave digger in Hāffar al-Qubūr and satirised in al-Asliha wa-l-Atfal.

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1. Diwan, 1, p. 474.
2. It should however be pointed out that as-Sayyāb did use ‘Ishtar and Tammūz symbolically on a more restricted level at this time, as when a patient injured in Hiroshima describes his wounds as roses and says:

   اهاليك في عثرة العالم السفلى، إياها

   Diwan, 1, p. 362.
This is particularly true of Sitwell's religiously orientated symbolism, and of her symbolic use of Biblical characters who are somehow involved with spiritual or physical suffering. It was in fact probably her symbolic use of Christ, Lazarus and Judas that encouraged as-Sayyāb to adopt Christ as a soteriological figure whose death would herald a new era of freedom, as in his poem "al-Masīḥ ba’d as-Salb". Similarly Judas became a symbol for those who treacherously failed to assist in the struggle for freedom:

هكذا عدتُ، تاصنمُ لا رأيتُ يهودًا...
فتمسكنت سيرته
...
نليأتي ناَمي في قبري
من يدري أيدين؟ من يدري؟
ورفاق يهوداً? من سيصدق مارعما؟? 1

while Lazarus was a symbol for an abortive revolution and a false dawn:

ويليل المسيح قبل العازر
دعاء يرفع،
دعاء لله المسيح مادعاه!

There is also little doubt that Sitwell's treatment of Cain's murder of his brother Abel influenced as-Sayyāb, who followed her lead and treated Cain as a symbol for the sins of man committed against man.

In the poem "Madinat as-Sindibād", from which the previous quotation was taken, as-Sayyāb makes Cain the vehicle for all the atrocities committed against the innocent:

\[
\text{مُمَتُّدُتُ تَوَأَّمُ } \\
\text{يَوَّدُ تَاَيْلُ كَيْنَّتُ بِالْحَيَاةَ} \\
\text{مَنْ رَجَعَ الْأَذَىَّ مَنْ مَنَأَبَتُ الْمَيَّاءَ} \\
\text{فَيُظْلِمُ العَدْوُ} \\
\text{وَيُتَحِيْنَ النَّسَاءُ فِي الْجَانَّ.}
\]

while, in another poem, Abel symbolises the tortured and the oppressed, and Cain the oppressor:

\[
\text{سَيْنَاءُ وَانْصَرِتْ هَيْارَتَهُ} \\
\text{تَاَيْلُ يَاَلِهُمْ سَيْنَاءُ الْجَمْعُ} \\
\text{وَرَّدَّهُ ''هَلْيُ '' ما قَضَاهُ بَارْنَاءُ} 
\]

Such images are however sometimes somewhat forced and strained, as in "al-Mūmīs al-‘Amyā", in which the reference to Cain is clearly superficial, although not totally ineffective:

\[
\text{ةَأَيْلُ '' أُعْفُنُ مَنْ الْحَرِيْمِ بِالْذَّنْهَرَ} \\
\text{وَبَا نَسَاءُ مِنْ الْعُظُورِ وَابْنَاسَاتُ النَّسَاءِ}
\]

1. Diwān, 1, p. 470. Eliot also used Lazarus (see Eliot, p. 16), but it seems more likely that this is an example of Sitwell's influence. For discussion of Sitwell and as-Sayyāb's treatment of symbols involving Christ, Lazarus, Judas, etc., see 'Abbās, Iḥsān, as-Sayyāb, p. 257; and 'Alī, al-Ustūra, p. 191.

2. Diwān, 1, p. 360. For discussion of her influence in as-Sayyāb's use of these symbols see 'Alī, al-Ustūra, p. 61; and 'Abbās, Iḥsān, as-Sayyāb, p. 255.

3. Diwān, 1, p. 510.
But as-Sayyāb soon moved on to a more natural treatment of his mythical material, and began to use ancient myths to explain man’s woes and aspirations, and to symbolise the fears, hopes and strife of his own society. This is particularly obvious in "Uchmiya fi Shahr Āb", in which as-Sayyāb satirises the leaders of his society. The rich hostess and her guest symbolise the upper classes and the rulers who know that their society is disintegrating, but are too lethargic or apathetic to do anything about it, while the black nanny is a symbol for the masses who are simply used according to the whims of their masters, but will one day rise up against their cowardly overlords. Yet the symbolism of this poem penetrates much deeper and is actually inherent in the title and in the first few lines of the poem. "Āb" is of course the most common word for August in Iraq, just as "tamām" is usually used for July. The first successful revolution to lead to a republic in Iraq took place in July 1958, but it soon became obvious that Qāsim’s régime would be little better, if not worse, than the previous one. When seen in this light the first lines of the poem take on an extremely significant meaning:

because Tammūz is now both the month and the god who has become a symbol for revolution, and his blood a symbol for the suffering and

1. Dīwān, 1, p. 328. See also p. 331 for an example of Tammūz symbolising the despair of those who await freedom.
struggle which had led thereto, while "Āb" stands for the period of strife which followed the revolution and for the disappointment of those who had previously rejoiced in their victory, but who shall, like Tammūz, rise again and bring new life to the world, and to Iraq.

As-Sayyāb has clearly begun to use myth symbolically by this time, and is successfully uniting ancient myths with modern realities, so that the myths become a vital part of his expression and are truly symbolic. This is probably most noticeable in his use of the Sumerian myth of Tammūz. According to the ancient sources, Tammūz died every year and descended into the Underworld, after which his beloved 'Ishtār would also forsake the Earth and go in search of her lover, during which time the Earth lost all its fertility and vegetation, which was only restored on her triumphal return to the World with Tammūz six months later.¹

In a letter dated May 1958 to Dr. Suhayl Idrīs as-Sayyāb states that he decided to use "Babylonian myths" in his poetry because he believed that "the Arabs themselves had adopted them" from the Babylonians, and that al-'Uzza was 'Ishtār, al-Lāt was Lāt, and that Wudd was Tammūz.² The rest of this letter shows that as-Sayyāb was clearly quoting from The Golden Bough, but it is interesting to note that he emphasises that these gods were in fact not only Babylonian, but were also worshipped by the Arabs albeit under different names. His claim that he was not using these myths "because they appeared in the land which we today inhabit"³, is also important, because it shows that

2. Rasā‘il, p. 83. See also Diwān, 1, p. 417, where Lāt replaces 'Ishtār as Tammūz's consort.
as-Sayyāb was not simply writing for the Iraqi public but was actually seeking to express the feelings of despair or hope felt by people in all the Arab states.

This is in fact borne out by his poetry. Although "Uchniya fī Shahr Āb" was undoubtedly principally concerned with the situation in Iraq, it was also intended as an illustration of the feelings of frustration and despair felt by many Arabs at this time, so that the death of Tammūz becomes a symbol for an Arab, rather than a purely Iraqi sense of defeat.

Similarly the return of Tammūz in "Ru'yā fī 'Am 1956" heralds a new era of freedom not only in Iraq but in all the Arab lands:

1. Divān, 1, p. 434. See also "Qasīda ilā l-'Irāq al-Thā'ir", p. 311:

2. Ibid., p. 485.
as 'Ishtar collects the pieces from Tammûz's body which has been torn apart by Cerberus, the dog who awaits souls at the entrance to Hades.¹

Although most examples of as-Sayyāb's use of the Tammûz myth are to be found in his political poems, there are a few examples of more personal significance. In a poem written approximately eight months before his death, as-Sayyāb uses both 'Ishtar and Tammûz when describing the comparative peace which he feels with the coming of daylight, which is like 'Ishtar, while night is like Tammûz's dust-covered wounds:

Christ also carried a personal significance for as-Sayyāb at this time, as he faced his inevitably early death:

when he identified himself with both Tammûz and Christ, amongst others. But Christ had also previously shared Tammûz's rôle as a symbol for the rebirth of Iraq and the Arab nations.²

1. See Pears Encyclopædia, p. 187.
2. Diwân, i, p. 627.
3. Ibid., p. 272.
4. Ibid., p. 434.
This is nowhere clearer than in his masterful poem "al-Masîh ba'd as-Salb", in which Christ's passion is a symbol for the suffering in the Arab lands, while the final lines show that his crucifixion is in fact the beginning of a new life and a new era, and not an end and a death:

كان في كل مرسي، صليب واحد، عزينة
فوجس الرب
هذا خاضن المدينة.

1

This idea of Christ, or Tammuz, sacrificing himself so that others may have life is in fact as-Sayyâb's principal message throughout Unshûdat al-Makar, except that it is the Arabs who must sacrifice themselves if they are to ensure a better future for themselves and their children. But his death is not always a symbol for hope, because it is sometimes a sign of defeat and humiliation:

وفي كل سبتي دسج، ومباني ودار,
ما دي ذلك الماء، هل تشربينه؟
ولم يهو الجرب، لا تأكلونها",
دمرز بنيه لات، المزينة.

2

although the final outcome is usually hopeful as is the case in his poem dedicated to the Arab revolutionary Jamîla bû Hayrid:

1. Diwan, 1, p. 462.
2. Ibid., p. 417.
Some critics have, like al-Baṣrī, believed that "the Christian myths in his verse remained superficial . . . and [were but] a copy of the models which were widely-known in European poetry"\(^2\), but such theories are clearly mistaken and seem to grow from xenophobic, rather than critical ideals, because as-Sayyāb's treatment of even the most Christian-orientated symbol mentioned above (in which God walks on Earth, i.e. Jesus) is natural and effective, and bears no trace of intellectual self-consciousness.

As-Sayyāb was not in fact interested in the religious or racial connotations of any of the myths used in his verse, and used them because of their poetic potential and inherent significances which could assist him in communicating his message to his reader. Thus Muḥammad, the Prophet, is also used to symbolise people's hopes and his death their despair in "Madinat as-Sindibād":

\[
\text{مَّعَمُّ الْيَتِيمُ أَمْرُوكُهُ نَالَاهُ،}
\text{يَمُنِّيٌّ مِنْ هَريِّهٍ، وَمَارِضَلُادْأَهُ،}
\text{سَنَفْسِيَّةٌ، سَنَبْدِيَّةٌ، سَنَعِينُهُ،}
\text{وَاحْرَقَ اللَّهُ فِي بَقَوْنِهِ.}
\]

while he is also a symbol for the fruitful struggle for freedom in "Fi l-Maghrib al-‘Arabī".\(^4\)

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1. Diwān, 1, p. 382.
2. al-Baṣrī, p. 76.
4. See Ibid., p. 402. See also above in the section on other symbolic features in as-Sayyāb's verse.
After 1960 as-Sayyāb tended to turn away from these myths to more introspective symbols, such as Ulysses/Odysseus, Sindibād and Job, the two eternal wanderers and the archetype of fortitude, to express his own condition. Thus Odysseus becomes a symbol for as-Sayyāb travelling the world looking for a cure:

وَلاَ مَلَّتُ أُوْلُيَّ الْسَّيِّئَاتِ يَمِنِبُّ فِي دِيْنِ الْأَلَّهَةِ

while, as Ulysses, he also symbolises his personal despair and alienation:

لَمْ أَنْ عُلِّيْسَ وَقَوْعَ عَادَ الْديَارِ

صَاحَتَ بِهِ الرَّأَبَةُ الْحَافِزَةُ الْمَرْضَرِ

آَنْ يَنْشُرُ الشَّرَّاءُ، آنْ يَصْلُ في بَارِهُ

دُونَ يَقِينٍ آنْ يَجُوِدُ فِي غُرُودٍ لَدَارِهۡ

Yet as Ulysses he also carries a certain political significance in "al-Ma‘bad al-Ghariq", in which his failure to return stands as a symbol for the Arabs' procrastination in rising against tyranny and foreign domination:

نَهَى عُلِيْسَ شَابُ فَتَاهُ كَبَيْسُمَ زَوْجَةَ الأَرْهَاجِ

عَنْدَا هَكَلًا فَنَّمَيْنَ تَعْوَدُ

1. Diwan, 1, p. 687.
2. Ibid., p. 218.
3. Ibid., p. 179.
Sindibād, on the other hand, was a purely personal mythological symbol for as-Sayyāb, in spite of the fact that he chose to call one of his most political poems "Madīnat as-Sindibād," although other poets used it with wider connotations. We know from a letter written in 1960 that as-Sayyāb was deeply influenced by The Thousand and One Nights, and it seems that Sindibād's story was particularly influential, perhaps because they shared the same native city. Yet whatever the cause as-Sayyāb definitely identified himself with this adventurous wanderer during the last few years of his life, and used Sindibād as a symbol for several different emotions.

In the haunting poem "Rahl an-Nahār," written in Beirut, as-Sayyāb sees himself as Sindibād, and his wife as Sindibād's wife who anxiously awaits his return, and unites both these women obliquely with Penelope, the wife of Ulysses:

وهي تنتظر عودة سيندبااد من السفر 
وبحير يصعد من شراعان بالعواص والعود 
هل هو يعود، أو علمت أنه أسرته ألمها الهجار

thus describing his own loneliness and that of his sorrowing wife in terms of that of these mythical characters. But in "al-Wasīyva" he uses Sindibād to express an even more personal emotion, that is his fear of death and his extreme loneliness before it:

2. Diwan, 1, p. 463 ff. Here Sindibād is a symbol for Iraq, and perhaps for Basra, Sindibād's native city, which contains an island called jazīrat as-Sindibād.
3. Rasāʾil, p. 90. See also al-Basri, p. 46.
Similarly as-Sayyāb saw Job as a fellow-sufferer who had also experienced great affliction, but had borne it manfully. Job is of course an archetypal figure of patience for the Arabs, and there is an Iraqi proverb which states, "Your patience is the patience of Job" (صبر صبر أيوب), but while mentioning Job's fidelity and devotion to God:

وَكَانَ أَيُوبُ اسْمَاهُ صَاحِبًا
لِلهِ فِي الْرَّزَايَةِ نَدَا
وَفِى الْخَراَجِ هُدَايَاً هُنَبِيبًا
أُضِمَّ لِلْمَصْدُورِ بَاقِتَانِا

as-Sayyāb concentrated more on emphasising his suffering:

يَارَبِ أَيُوبُ فَتَعَايِبِكَ يَا الْخَرَاءُ
فِي附近的 دَرْبَنَا يَا الْأَوْرَاسَكِنَّ
يَعُونُ فِي الْعُسْرِ
يَعُونُ فِي ظَلْمَةِ الْمَوتِ يَا عَبَايَا
نَادَ الْفَزَاوِيَةِ يَا عَارِفِهِ إنَّكَ هَنَأَ

---

1. Diwān, 1, p. 219.
2. Ibid., p. 249 and p. 257 resp.
so that Job became a symbol for his suffering rather than for his patience, which would have been more in keeping with the normal Arab significance.

Yet it is just this type of treatment of myth that makes as-Sayyāb's mythical verse truly symbolic, because he refused to tie himself to their ancient connotations or more normal significances. For as-Sayyāb the most important aspect of myth was that it helped him to explain himself clearly without resorting to direct statement, and rendered his poetry more expressive and artistic. Thus, although he used many myths which were non-Arab and non-Islamic, they soon became so much a part of his poetic expression that myth and reality were totally united, and could not be separated without causing great damage to the artistic unity of the poem, or even destroying it totally. Furthermore as-Sayyāb successfully moulded his mythological material to suit the dictates of each poem and used them as a point of reference, which he then expanded according to his theme and intentions. Because of this he could, as we have seen, safely combine more than one myth in a single poem as part of his natural expression, which also illustrates the archetypal nature of myth in his verse.

In this way as-Sayyāb used myths to illustrate archetypal virtues or vices, combining those concerning pain and death with those which involved fertility and growth without creating unnecessary tensions in his verse, while also succeeding in using myth both politically, to

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1. For references to his use of Greek myths, and of Old Testament stories see Addendum. It should however be noted that many of these Biblical stories are also to be found in the Qur'ān (e.g. Gog and Magog, and of course Job).
2. See Divān, 1, p. 482, p. 272 and p. 429 for examples.
express his own feelings of alienation, fear and despair as his death approached.

He was, in fact, the first Arab poet to do this on such a large scale, and to give such general symbolic significance to mythological tales and protagonists. Yet we should always remember that he continued to use both myth and the other symbolist features of his verse within a Romantic framework, and always relied on his own personal expression of his feelings towards his society and Existence generally, even if he employed the objective correlative and symbolist techniques, so that his mature verse can never be called introspective, and is passionately involved with the problems and aspirations of his nation and of mankind, or with man's physical and spiritual struggle against death.

We should therefore perhaps describe as-Sayyāb's poetry as "symbolistic romanticism" because, while employing symbolist theories, he never forsook his ideal that poetry should play its part in the eternal struggle of mankind against evil and oppression, nor his belief that poetry should be capable of conveying the poet's intention to his reader. For this reason he never indulged in surrealist tendencies or pandered to those who believed in Art for Art's Sake, and deserves to be remembered as one of the modern world's greatest symbolistic Romantic poets.
CONCLUSION

The general conclusion of this thesis is that Badr Shākir as-Sayyāb was one of the most talented poets yet produced by the modern Arabic-speaking world, and was a Romantic throughout his life. This Romanticism was not however all of one type, because it changed as as-Sayyāb himself matured intellectually and stylistically. In fact it can be divided into three major phases:

i) The imitative: in which he tended to copy the poetry of older poets, especially Tāhā and Abū Shabaka, although the Mahjār, the Dīwān school and the Apollo group were also influential. In this stage, which would extend into Asāṭīr (but could not be applied to the whole Dīwān) and cover his Bawākīr and Azhār Dhabila, as-Sayyāb wrote within the fixed, negative framework of the more normal Romanticism of modern Arabic, and concentrated upon idealised love and Nature, which were always a refuge for the pained poet who found this world alien and lonely, shunned as he was by his fellow men; although he wrote a few political poems as well.

ii) The personal humanistic: which would cover part of Asāṭīr, extend into Unshūdat al-Maṭār and the committed verse of the 1950s, and linger slightly into later volumes. In this phase as-Sayyāb composed verse according to his personal convictions and attitudes, both political and humanistic, and showed his passionate commitment to his country in poems like "Unshūdat al-Maṭār" or "Madinat as-Sindibād", and to mankind irrespective of race, creed or colour in poems like Ḥaffār al-Qubūr and "Min Ru'yā Fū Kār". It was during this period of his life that as-Sayyāb became acquainted with the works of Sitwell and Eliot (amongst others) and immediately fell
under their influence. As a result he began to employ myths symbolically to communicate his patriotism and feelings for mankind obliquely, while using various other Symbolist techniques to the same end. However he never aligned himself with the Symbolists of Europe or the Arab Pre-Symbolists who believed in Art for Art's Sake, and sought to reproduce their convictions or emotions in the text of the poem itself, because he, like the Romantics, always believed that the poet should express his own ideas and feelings in his verse, and so strove to evoke a psychological state similar to his own at the time of composition in his reader, especially by the use of leitmotif and associative diction. In this way he borrowed many Symbolist devices but employed them within a Romantic framework, and should perhaps be called a "Symbolistic Romantic".

iii) The subjective: which would cover poems like "an-Nahr wa-l-Mawt" in Unshūdat al-Maṭar, and subsequent poems written before his death in 1964. In this stage as-Sayyāb continued to write in the style which he manipulated so masterfully in Unshūdat al-Maṭar, but tended towards more subjective themes, although he did not dissociate himself totally from his commitment to his country, the Arabs and mankind. Yet the poetry written during these years could never be described as introspective although it contains some of the negative aspects of his first phase, because it is a positive expression of his struggle against ill-health, which is not his alone but is a part of man's archetypal fight against despair and death.

Thus as-Sayyāb moved beyond the restrictive limits of his Arab Romantic predecessors into the major Romantic traditions of the world, to join other great poets who have poured their deep-seated emotions, philosophies and convictions into their verse, and shunned escapism
and artificiality. In doing so as-Sayyāb made a great contribution to modern Arabic poetry, especially in the fields of metrics, evocative diction and symbolistic mythology, and proved a strong and formative influence upon both his contemporaries and the subsequent generation of poets; an influence which has continued until the present day and will continue for many years to come.
ADDENDUM

This is intended as an indication of as-Sayyāb's references to Islamic, Biblical and Mythical figures and is by no means exhaustive.

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Дивāн, 1, p. 272; p. 321; p. 325; p. 326; p. 327; p. 352; p. 357; p. 370; p. 378; p. 382; p. 384; p. 390; p. 391; p. 399; p. 403; p. 405; p. 417; p. 420; p. 427; p. 457; p. 469 and p. 496.

*ISHTAR*

Дивāн, 1, p. 121; p. 383; p. 384; p. 410; p. 412; p. 437; p. 469; p. 485; p. 486; p. 489; p. 623 and p. 627.

* Tammuz

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Diwān, 1, p. 687.

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