UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA

Los Angeles

Speaking Laterally:

Transnational Poetics and the Rise of Modern Arabic and Persian Poetry in Iraq and Iran

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the

requirements for the degree Doctor of Philosophy

in Near Eastern Languages and Cultures

by

Thomas Levi Thompson

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ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

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Thomas Levi Thompson

Doctor of Philosophy in Near Eastern Languages and Cultures

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Professor Nouri Gana, Chair

This dissertation critically investigates the transnational movements that shaped the making of modernist poetry in Iraq and Iran. Following a brief introduction to the project's historical and critical framework, the first chapter provides the dissertation's theoretical foundation. It thus engages conversations about literary commitment, the transnational dimension of literary development, and world literature to situate these two poetries as integral to the broader modernist movement. Chapter Two examines the poetry of Nīmā Yūshīj, the founder of Persian modernist poetry, and the foundational position of premodern Arabic prosody for Persian poetic form. It highlights how Nīmā's innovations on Arabic prosody presage the birth of the Iraqi free verse movement. Chapter Three moves on to discuss the work of Iraqi poet Badr Shākir al-Sayyāb, addressing how his pioneering project of poetic modernism changed in light of his political alignments. It demonstrates how his experience of the 1953 coup against Mosaddegh in Iran forced him to reconsider his Communist affiliations and discerns the effects his changing

political outlook had on how he presented his poetry for posterity. Aḥmad Shāmlū and Furūgh Farrukhzād, two poets who took up Nīmā's modernist vision in Iran, are the subjects of Chapter Four, which tackles their continued development of Arabic prosody in Persian and ultimate break with the formal constraints Nīmā had continued to adhere to. It also considers Shāmlū's and Farrukhzād's contrasting poetics of death in terms of their transnational poetic engagements. The final chapter turns to examine the Iraqi poet ʿAbd al-Wahhāb al-Bayātī's poetics of revolution—which combines existentialism, Sufism, and political commitment—to show how al-Bayātī's use of the poetic masks of ʿUmar al-Khayyām and the martyred Sufi Manṣūr al-Ḥallāj works in transnational dialog with the Persian poetic and mystical traditions. By taking the Arabic modernist tradition as its focal point and putting Arabic poetry in conversation with modernist poetry in Persian, this study sheds light on how modernism functions as a planetary movement and calls for a reconsideration of current models for transnational literary analysis, reorienting modernist studies away from vertical approaches to lateral ones that consider minor modernist traditions on their own terms.

The dissertation of Thomas Levi Thompson is approved.

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University of California, Los Angeles

2017

For Emily, *amal ḥayātī*.

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Arabic and Persian Transliteration and Transcription Chart

Consonants:	Arabic Transliteration	Persian Transliteration
ء	ʾ	ʾ
ب	b	b
پ	-	p
ت	t	t
ث	th	s̲
ج	j	j
چ	-	ch
ح	ḥ	ḥ
خ	kh	kh
د	d	d
ذ	dh	z̲
ر	r	r
ز	z	z
ژ	-	zh
س	s	s
ش	sh	sh
ص	ṣ	ṣ
ض	ḍ	ż
ط	ṭ	ṭ
ظ	ẓ	ẓ
ع	ʿ	ʿ
غ	gh	gh
ف	f	f
ق	q	q
ك	k	k
گ	-	g
ل	l	l
م	m	m
ن	n	n
ه	h	h
و	w	v *or* w
ي	y	y
ة	ah (at in construct state)	-
ال	al- *or* -l-	al- *or* -l-
(...)-ها	-	-hā
(...)-های	-	-hā-yi

Vowels:	Arabic Transliteration	Persian Transliteration
ا or ى	ā	ā
و	ū	ū
ي	ī	ī
ـِيّ	iyy	iyy
ـُوّ	uww	uvv
ـَو	aw	aw
ـَي	ay	ay
ـَ	a	a
ـُ	u	u
ـِ	i	i

I transliterate quotations of Arabic or Persian prose. I transcribe all poetry. Where a Persian long *vāv* is clearly short due to the meter of a poem, I have transcribed it "*u*" instead of "*ū*." There is a single instance of *iqlāb* (a silent *nūn* followed by a *bāʾ*), which I have indicated as "*ṃ*" in my transcription.

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the forest for the trees. If this dissertation succeeds at piquing anyone's interest who is not already familiar with its subjects, I must admit that Nouri deserves all the credit.

I worked on this project in Los Angeles, Berkeley, and Providence, and I largely ignored it during summers and vacations in Oakland, Virginia, and New York. I am thus indebted to a criss-crossing community of students, scholars, teachers, writers, and friends. At UCLA, I was fortunate to find common cause with members of the Comparative Literature, History, Asian Languages and Cultures, and NELC departments. At the risk of forgetting someone, I will attempt a list of comrades who read poetry, theory, or the holy texts of *Das Kapital*, *The Waste Land*, and the rest of the Gospels with me: Shir Alon, Herman Adney, Nasia Anam, Ed Blankenship, Fatima Burney, Alejandra Campoy, Rob Farley, Jenny Forsythe, Isabel Gomez, Esmat Elhalaby, Ali Hamdan, Suleiman Hodali, Matt Lauer, Dana Linda, Rebecca Lippman, Naveed Mansoori, Naveena Naqvi, Michelle Quay, Sina Rahmani, Laura Reizman, Kevin Richardson, Syed Rizwan, Sahba Shayani, Ken Shima, Renata Stauder, Jack Wilson, Duncan Yoon, Omar Zahzah, and Helga Zambrano. Rawad Wehbe, who was also at UCLA for a time, has since showed me what tenacity really means, and his enthusiasm has been contagious. I thank Azza Ahmad, Abeer Hamza, Afaf Nash, and Albert Johns from the UCLA Arabic program, as well as David Hirsch at the Charles E. Young Research Library, where I enjoyed working as his assistant.

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I was fortunate to have the opportunity to join the Center for Arabic Study Abroad in Cairo, where I was studying during the 2011 uprising. It is because of CASA's terrific teaching staff and administration that I learned to put away the dictionary and actually read in foreign languages. To Laila Al Sawi, Ahmad Hameed, Nadia Harb, Heba Salem, Iman Soliman, Dina Eldik, and the rest of the CASA staff and students, thank you! It was in Cairo where I helped create the *Tahrir Documents* archive with Emily Drumsta, Alex Winder, Cameron Hu, and Elias Saba—the last two of whom were with me during my time at the University of Pennsylvania. With them, thanks are also owed there to friends Jeff Arsenault, Kameliya Atanasova, Rachid Azizi, Matthew Burnard, Omar Foda, Nicholas Harris, Murad Idris, Agatha Koprowski, Rose Muravchick, Ted Van Loan, Chip Rossetti, and Yassi Soufi and professors Jamal Ali, Roger M.A. Allen, Paul Cobb, Jamal Elias, Joseph Lowry, Pardis Minuchehr, Holly Pittman, and Heather Sharkey.

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Curriculum Vitae

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Translations

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"Al-Azhar Draft Constitution of 1979," translated with Elias Saba in Assem Hefny, "Religious Authorities and Constitutional Reform: The Case of Al-Azhar in Egypt," *Constitutionalism, Human Rights, and Islam after the Arab Spring*, Rainer Grote and Tilmann J. Röder, eds. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), 113-121. (Arabic)

"Badr Shakir al-Sayyab: The Poem and the Phoenix," *Jadaliyya*, 24 December 2014. http://www.jadaliyya.com/pages/index/20361/badr-shakir-al-sayyab_the-poem-and-the-phoenixn. (Arabic)

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"Condoleezza Rice's Piano by Sa'dī Yūsuf," *Transference*, 1:1 (2013), Article 13. http://scholarworks.wmich.edu/transference/vol1/iss1/13. (Arabic)

Introduction

Break Poetry's Back! The Transnational Beginnings of Modern Arabic and Persian Poetry

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حطّموا عمود الشعر

- لويس عوض، *بلوتولاند*

Break Poetry's Back

- Louis Awad (Luwīs ʿAwaḍ), *Plutoland*[1]

"*Ḥaṭṭimū ʿamūd al-shiʿr*"—thus began the Egyptian writer and Marxist Louis Awad (1915-1990) the introduction to his 1947 collection of experimental poems, *Plutoland*. "Break poetry's back!" he commands his readers. These three words called out for revolutionary change in the world of Arabic letters. For more than a thousand years, *ʿamūd al-shiʿr*, poetry's back, had provided the formal core of Arabic literature, a structure that aided poetry's oral transmission when combined with a monorhyme and any one of sixteen standard poetic meters. Arabic is a language largely made up of three-letter word roots, and the root *ʿayn – mīm – dāl* in the word *ʿamūd* has to do with propping up or supporting something.[2] From this root, we get words like *ʿumdah* (support; prop), *ʿimād* (buttress; pole; pillar), and *ʿamūd* (pole; post; column). The phrase *ʿamūd faqrī* means vertebral column, and I have decided to borrow from this usage of the term in my translation of Awad's title. By ordering his readers to break out of the traditional metrical mold ("*ḥaṭṭimū ʿamūd al-shiʿr*"), Awad is calling for nothing less than an attack on poetry's shape upon the page and its structure in the mind, not to mention the formal features lying at the core of Arabic poetry.

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[1] Luwīs ʿAwaḍ, *Blūtūlānd wa-qasāʾid ukhrā min shiʿr al-khāṣṣah* (al-Qāhirah: al-Hayʾah al-Miṣriyyah al-ʿĀmmah li-l-Kitāb, 1989 [1947]), 9. All translations are mine unless otherwise noted.

[2] s.v. "ʿ*amūd*," in E.W. Lane, *Arabic-English Lexicon* (Cambridge: Islamic Texts Society, 1984 [1863-1893]).

Arab critics conceived of the poem as a tent held up by a central pole, the *ʿamūd*.[3] But, as Huda Fakhreddine explains, the phrase *ʿamūd al-shiʿr* (which she translates literally as "the tent pole of poetry" and figuratively as "the accepted conventions of poetry") only entered the critical tradition *after* the advent of the *muḥdath* (pl. *muḥdathūn*) movement, the movement of the premodern "modernist" poets who composed their poems during the first centuries of the Abbasid Caliphate (r. 750-1258). Critics such as al-Āmidī (d. ca. 897), al-Qāḍī al-Jurjānī (d. 1001), and al-Marzūqī (d. 1030) developed a critical framework for *ʿamūd al-shiʿr* by contrasting the difficult poetry of the *muḥdath* poets (modernists such as Abū Tammām [d. ca. 845/846], Bashshār ibn Burd [d. ca. 784/785], and Ibn al-Rūmī [d. ca. 896/897 or 889]) with the more natural poetry of the *qadīm* (ancient, pre-Islamic, or "old" poetry).[4] The premodern critics held in high regard poets who conformed to the rules of *ʿamūd al-shiʿr* that the critics themselves had standardized. For instance, al-Āmidī tells us that the "more moderate" *muḥdath* modernist al-Buḥturī (d. 897) "follows the methods of the ancients and does not depart from the accepted conventions of poetry (*ʿamūd al-shiʿr*)."[5]

But when Awad issues his order, "*ḥaṭṭimū ʿamūd al-shiʿr*," in 1947, the meanings of *ʿamūd al-shiʿr* and *muḥdath* he has in mind have already shifted. We find him lumping together Abū Tammām with al-Buḥturī as poets who both conform to the same *ʿamūd al-shiʿr* he intends for his audience to break! "Our generation reads Valéry [d.1945] and T.S. Eliot [d. 1965]," he

[3] Huda J. Fakhreddine provides a succinct analysis of the origin of the phrase "*ʿamūd al-shiʿr*" in the Arabic tradition in her *Metapoesis in the Arabic Tradition: From Modernists to* Muḥdathūn (Leiden: Brill, 2015), 71-74.

[4] Fakhreddine, *Metapoesis in the Arabic Tradition*, 73, 72.

[5] Fakhreddine, *Metapoesis in the Arabic Tradition*, 74, 72. Parentheses in original. She here quotes from al-Āmidī's *al-Muwāzanah*, in which we find the first instance of the phrase *ʿamūd al-shiʿr*. See Abū al-Qāsim al-Ḥasan ibn Bishr al-Āmidī, *al-Muwāzanah bayna shiʿr Abī Tammām wa-l-Buḥturī*, 2nd ed., Aḥmad Ṣaqr ed., Vol. 1 (al-Qāhirah: Dār al-Maʿārif, 1972), 8-9.

declares, "and we do not read al-Buḥturī or Abū Tammām."[6] By the time Awad was writing, *ʿamūd al-shiʿr* had come to represent the entire Arabic poetic tradition, from the earliest pre-Islamic odes to the occasional poetry of the Egyptian poet laureate, Aḥmad Shawqī (d. 1932), and Awad considered the original *muḥdathūn* to be as traditionalist as the rest.

For Awad, the tradition of Arabic poetry ends with Shawqī. As we venture into the first lines of his introduction, we find him announcing the death of "Arabic" poetry—the quotation marks are Awad's. "'Arabic' poetry has died (*la-qad māta al-shiʿr 'al-ʿarabī'*). It died in 1932. It died when Aḥmad Shawqī died. It died an everlasting death—it's dead."[7] If Arabic poetry has died, what is left to break? And why does Awad put Arabic in scare quotes? Who killed Arabic poetry?

By the time Awad was writing, the foundations of Arabic poetry had been tried, tested, shaken, and even broken as Arabic literary culture developed over the ages and spread across a vast swath of the Middle East, the Near East, and North Africa[8]—to say nothing of the worldwide movement of Islam, which carried with it the Arabic language in the Qurʾān. Awad's declaration of Arabic poetry's "death" is both highly ironic and hyperbolic, as he envisions a future full of possibilities for poets still writing in Arabic but striking out into new poetic realms. In fact, later in his introduction, he informs us that

> poetry has not died, but Arabic poetry has. The truth of the matter is that Arabic poetry's back (*ʿamūd al-shiʿr al-ʿarabī*) was not broken during our generation. Rather, it was broken in the tenth century: the Andalusians broke it. The truth of

[6] ʿAwaḍ, *Blūtūlānd*, 10.

[7] ʿAwaḍ, *Blūtūlānd*, 9.

[8] I will be referring to the area of Iraq and Iran on which I focus as the Near East below, though I would not exclude surrounding countries from the designation.

> the matter is that Arabic poetry did not die during our generation. Rather, it died in the seventh century: the Egyptians killed it.[9]

As it turns out Arabic poetry did not die with Shawqī in 1932. According to Awad, Arabic poetry was dead on arrival in Egypt because the poetry the Egyptians composed in Arabic was different than that of the ancient Arabs, different than that of the poets who stayed behind in Arabia, in Iraq, or in Syria. As Arabic literature spread across the Near and Middle East and throughout the southern Mediterranean, it began a process of transaction with other cultural contexts and their literatures, which resulted in an ongoing dynamic relationship between the Arabs and the cultures they came into contact with. Arabic poetry may have remained Arabic because it was composed in the Arabic language, but it was no longer purely Arab. "We can certainly say that Arabic poetry in Egypt did not die, for it was never even born there,"[10] Awad elaborates, and hence the scare quotes he puts around "Arabic." Moving on to Andalusia, where the Arabs arrived in the eighth century, new poetic forms like the *muwashshaḥāt* with their mixed-rhyme stanzas and the *zajal*, which incorporated colloquial language,[11] appeared as Arabic literary culture mixed with local Christian and Jewish cultures. Looking to these changes, Awad shows his readers that *ʿamūd al-shiʿr* had already been broken centuries ago as Arabic literature traveled with the Islamic conquests (*futūḥāt*), came into contact with other traditions, and developed through its interactions with them.

With *Plutoland*, titled after the (former) planet that Clyde Tombaugh (d. 1997) had only recently discovered in 1930, Awad wanted to force Arabic poetry into the outer limits of its

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[9] ʿAwaḍ, *Blūtūlānd*, 10.

[10] ʿAwad, *Blūtūlānd*, 10.

[11] G. Schoeler, "*Muwashshaḥ*," *Encyclopaedia of Islam, Second Edition* [*EI2*]. http://dx.doi.org/10.1163/1573-3912_islam_COM_0826; G. Schoeler and W. Stoetzer, "*Zaǧal*," *EI2*. http://dx.doi.org/10.1163/1573-3912_islam_COM_1373.

possibilities by adopting European styles wholesale, giving up the older Arabic meters, revolutionizing rhyme schemes, exploring the possibilities of prose poetry, and elevating colloquial Arabic poetry to the same level of literature written in standard Arabic, *fuṣḥā*. This last suggestion did not sit well with contemporary Arabic critical tastes, and so Awad's call to "break poetry's back" and the experimental poetry that followed in *Plutoland* found no receptive audience at the time. Even today, traditional poetry based on *ʿamūd al-shiʿr* remains popular across the Arab world.

Despite the continued resilience of traditional forms, Arabic modernist poetry eventually found its place, and Awad's introduction reveals the difficulties the new modernists faced. He situates the new generation of poets who came after Shawqī, which includes himself, against those who came before. "The battle, then," he tells us, "is a biological one. A battle between the young and the old (*maʿrakah bayna al-shabāb wa-l-shuyūkh*)."[12] More than this, however, the young generation's willingness to engage with European poetry opened up new poetic vistas before it, just as the Andalusian poets invented new poetic forms out of the cultural mixing they experienced in premodern Europe. "The Europeans," Awad writes admiringly, "have understood how to reject the ancients (*al-qudāmā*), and they have renewed life (*jaddadū al-ḥayāt*) with innovative melodies."[13] He further argues that the new generation of Arabic poets must do the same thing with their tradition by giving up the premodern monorhyme, going beyond the standard sixteen Arabic poetic meters, and focusing on the unity of the entire poem rather than single lines.[14] By turning to earlier instances of cultural contact that went on between the Arabs

[12] ʿAwad, *Blūtūlānd*, 15.

[13] ʿAwad, *Blūtūlānd*, 21.

[14] ʿAwad, *Blūtūlānd*, 21, 24.

and others, first in Egypt and later in Andalusia, Awad highlights the foundational role intercultural transactions had for the development of Arabic literature and makes the case for his generation's contemporary engagement with European literature. Although *Plutoland* may not have successfully instigated the poetic revolution Awad wanted, his introduction locates the primary impetus for Arabic poetry's development at the margins of the Arab world in its interactions with other cultures, languages, peoples, and places: first in Egypt, then Moorish Spain, and finally the Europe of Valéry and Eliot.

But Arabic modernism was not simply a product of European modernism. In the very same year that Awad published *Plutoland* in Egypt, a new generation of Iraqi poets had already begun exploring new poetic avenues with their compositions of what they came to call *al-shiʿr al-ḥurr*, free verse, which I discuss at more length in the following chapter. While *Plutoland* was largely ignored in Egypt as too radical,[15] the Iraqi modernist pioneers Nāzik al-Malāʾikah (d. 2007) and Badr Shākir al-Sayyāb (d. 1964) found an audience that responded favorably to their free verse. By 1950, the movement of Arabic poetic modernism had gained a foothold in Iraq. The Iraqis provided a theoretical and formal basis for their poetry that remained grounded in the Arabic tradition. They changed the form of the poem on the page by making the poetic foot (still based on the feet of premodern Arabic poetry) the basis of their poetic rhythms rather than the entire line. Because they did not call for their contemporaries to completely break away from *ʿamūd al-shiʿr*, their poems provided the first models for the new poetry that soon followed them in other Arab countries. This new poetry shared much in kind with poetic developments

[15] For more extensive treatments of Awad's poetic project, see Fadel K. Jabr, "The Children of Gilgamesh: A Half Century of Modern Iraqi Poetry," *Metamorphoses: a journal of literary translation* 19, nos. 1-2 (Spring/Fall 2011): 341-344 and Abdul-Nabi Isstaif, "Forging a New Self, Embracing the Other: Modern Arabic Critical Theory and the West—Luwīs ʿAwaḍ," *Arabic and Middle Eastern Literatures* 5, no. 2 (2002): 161-180.

happening across the border (both geographic and linguistic but—importantly—not prosodic) in Iran, where poets also stopped depending on the entire premodern poetic line in favor of the poetic foot, repeated or not as necessary in each line.

I take the poems of the Iraqi modernists as a starting point for understanding the role transnational dynamics of poetic exchange had in the wider development of the planetary modernist movement.[16] I begin with Awad's introduction because he recognizes the importance of the transnational, translingual, and transcultural transactions that led to poetic development in the Arabic tradition. In what follows, I comparatively study Iraqi poetic modernism and the Persian modernist tradition that emerged in Iran at roughly the same time. In these two traditions, we find a deep reserve of shared formal, thematic, and mythic foundations for modernist poetry, which poets combined with parallel developments on the system of Arabic prosody that undergirds both Arabic and Persian poetry.

[16] I use the term "planetary" instead of "global" here following Susan Stanford Friedman's suggestion in *Planetary Modernisms: Provocations on Modernity Across Time*, Modernist Latitudes, Jessica Berman and Paul Saint-Amour eds. (New York: Columbia University Press, 2015). My understanding of transnationalism is informed by recent scholarship found in Paul Jay, *Global Matters: The Transnational Turn in Literary Studies* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2010); Jahan Ramazani, *A Transnational Poetics* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2009); and *Minor Transnationalism*, Françoise Lionnet and Shu-mei Shih eds. (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2005). It is also inflected with Friedman's suggestion of a "planetary turn" in modernist studies that has developed from the "work of a community of scholars challenging canonical modernist studies, pushing the field in new directions by focusing on other modernisms in non-Western parts of the world". Still, Near Eastern literatures are conspicuously absent from her list of recent work in this direction (*Planetary Modernisms*, 5-6), and they have as of this writing yet to make serious inroads into Columbia University Press's Modernist Latitudes series, which is supposed to "pay particular attention to the texts and contexts of those latitudes (Africa, Latin America, Australia, Asia, Southern Europe, and even the rural United States) that have long been misrecognized as ancillary to the canonical modernisms of the global North" (https://cup.columbia.edu/series/modernist-latitudes). Arabic literature goes almost unmentioned in the following books claiming to address modernism more globally, to say nothing of Persian literature (which authors in the series have, as far as I can tell, completely ignored): Aarti Vadde, *Chimeras of Form: Modernist Internationalism Beyond Europe, 1914-2016,* Modernist Latitudes (New York: Columbia University Press, 2016); *A New Vocabulary for Global Modernism*, Eric Hayot and Rebecca L. Walkowitz eds., Modernist Latitudes (New York: Columbia University Press, 2016); and Steven S. Lee, *The Ethnic Avant-Garde: Minority Cultures and World Revolution*, Modernist Latitudes (New York: Columbia University Press, 2015). Other books in the series examine particular national and/or linguistic contexts, none of which are located in the Near East or North Africa.

Arabic and Persian lay at the heart of the planetary modernist movement due to their geographical beginnings in the Near East, the wellspring of the mythic imaginary that defined even European modernist poetry. Iraqi and Iranian poets therefore have much to tell us if we want to understand modernism as a whole and its various iterations across the planet. Although Arabic and Persian modernism emerged out of Iraqi and Iranian poets' engagements with European thought and poetry, these poets also carried out a project of speaking laterally across their poetic traditions—often beyond the reaches of European poetic influence and especially because of their shared Arabic prosodic tradition. In their poetry they negotiated, on the one hand, European colonialism and an increasing familiarity with Western poetry in the Near East and, on the other, the continued influence of Arabic prosody and premodern poetic themes.

Using comparative analysis, I study the work of the Iraqi and Iranian modernists transnationally. I am interested in their lateral relationships with each other, that is, the profound connections between Arabic and Persian poetry that lay outside or even challenged European influence during the colonial, decolonial, and postcolonial periods. By focusing on these lateral transactions between Iraqi and Iranian poetries during their modernist periods, from roughly 1938-1967 in Iran and 1947-1967 in Iraq, I argue that we cannot simply understand Persian and Arabic modernisms to be the results or reflections of European interventions or influence in the Near East, but rather as parts of a transnational dynamic of poetic exchange that deserves a place in wider discussions about the overall spread of literary modernism.

My argument works at two levels. First, I show that Iraqi and Iranian modernist poetries are linked in terms of both poetic form and content, including the similar innovations on the

Arabic prosodic system and use of myth[17]—especially myths of death and rebirth—in both traditions. Second, building on the connections I locate at the first level, I illustrate how these two poetic traditions come together, both through their formal connections and their use of symbols,[18] as a transnational response to the globalizing and homogenizing forces that followed in the wake of Western colonialism. I thus conclude that reading Iraqi and Iranian modernism as parts of a transnational phenomenon is essential for us to understand both movements and challenge Eurocentric models of literary dynamism and change. By using this transnational approach, I ultimately question the efficacy of hermetic, single language studies of Near Eastern literatures or those that solely trace European influences on Near Eastern poetry.

In making transnational links between Iraqi and Iranian modernist poetry, I draw on a wide variety of thought, both from the literary traditions in question and from the West. It would be short-sighted to simply deny the influence of Western philosophy and poetry in the growth of Iraqi and Iranian modernism, just as I would merely be extending orientalist biases were I to ignore indigenous intellectual approaches to these movements. However, rather than bracketing European influence—a fruitless endeavor as we can trace both Iraqi and Iranian modernisms' roots, at least in part, to European modernism—I explore where modernist Persian and Arabic poetries sit in relation to their pasts, to Europe, and to modernism as a planetary phenomenon.

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[17] "[A] narrative or group of narratives which recount the activities of a culture's gods and heroes. These narratives are the product of communal and (often) sacred impulses to sanction and reflect the cultural order existing at the time of their creation." John B. Vickery, "Myth," *The New Princeton Encyclopedia of Poetry and Poetics* [*NPE*]. http://gateway.proquest.com/openurl?ctx_ver=Z39.88-2003&xri:pqil:res_ver=0.2&res_id=xri:lion&rft_id=xri:lion:ft:ref:R00793847:0.

[18] I understand symbol as "a kind of figurative language in which what is shown (normally referring to something material) means, by virtue of some sort of resemblance, suggestion, or association, something *more* or something else (normally immaterial)." Norman Friedman, "Symbol," *NPE*. http://gateway.proquest.com/openurl?ctx_ver=Z39.88-2003&xri:pqil:res_ver=0.2&res_id=xri:lion&rft_id=xri:lion:ft:ref:R00794137:0. Italics in original.

Chapter One

Modern Poetry in Iraq and Iran and the Transnational Approach

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The Rise of Modern Poetry in Iraq and Iran

> آخر ما أود أن أقوله في هذه المقدمة، إنني أؤمن بمستقبل الشعر العربي إيماناً حاراً عميقاً. أؤمن أنه مندفع بكل ما في صدور شعرائه من قوى ومواهب وإمكانيات، ليتبوأ مكاناً رفيعاً في أدب العالم.
> وألف تحية بشعراء الغد.
>
> - نازك الملائكة، *شظايا ورماد*
>
> The final thing I would like to say in this introduction is that I truly, deeply believe in the future of Arabic poetry. I believe that it is bursting with all the strengths, talents, and possibilities found within its poets' hearts and will occupy pride of place within world literature.
> A thousand greetings to tomorrow's poets.
>
> - Nāzik al-Malāʾikah, *Shaẓāyā wa-ramād*[19]

Louis Awad saw himself as something of a prophet heralding a new age of Arabic poetry after Shawqī, a modern poetry for a modern time. The Iraqi poets I look to in this dissertation also conceived of themselves as poets writing poetry suited to their modern era, and it is through their own self-conception that I understand them to be modernists due to what Michel Foucault would call their *attitude of modernity*.[20] Take Nāzik al-Malāʾikah's closing paragraph in the introduction she included with her second *dīwān* (collection of poetry), which she titled *Shaẓāyā wa-ramād* (*Shrapnel and Ashes*) and published in 1949. She wrote these lines towards the beginning of the modernist movement in Iraq, and like Awad before her in Egypt, she sets up a dichotomy between the poets of her generation (along with those of tomorrow) and the poets who came before them. Also like Awad, she considers the traditional *ʿamūd al-shiʿr* too

[19] (Bayrūt: Dār al-ʿAwdah, 1971 [1949]), 27.

[20] Foucault suggests that modernity be considered "rather as an attitude than as a period in history." "What is Enlightenment?" ("*Qu'est-ce que les Lumières?*") *The Foucault Reader*, Catherine Porter trans., Paul Rabinow ed. (New York: Pantheon Books, 1984), 39.

constraining for poetic creativity. She imagines Arabic poetry eventually occupying "pride of place" in the canon of world literature (*adab al-ʿālam*), but only if Arab poets are willing to interact with other cultural and linguistic contexts in order to revivify their language and to develop premodern Arabic forms to better express themselves.[21] If the poets answer her call, she believes that eventually "nothing of the old styles will remain, for meters, rhymes, styles, and schools will all be shaken to their core."[22]

In the first half of this chapter, I further explore these developments of modern poetry in Arabic and Persian, beginning with its formal features. I then turn to how scholars and critics have approached these two modern poetic traditions and the poetry of the subjects in my study. The latter half of the chapter covers what I refer to as a *transnational turn*, a profound shift of focus lying at the core of Near Eastern modernist poetry and caused by a combination of European poetic influence in a colonial context and the increasingly important role of the Soviet Union in the region on the one hand and local reactions to these revolutionary forces on the other. In this second section, I discuss the reception of the concept of literary commitment in the Near East and how my transnational paradigm for understanding modernist poetry develops out of this poetry's inherently transnational composition. After addressing current scholarly discussions of transnationalism and literature, I conclude the chapter with some reflections on where my project fits with regard to our conception of world literature and what Iraqi and Iranian modernist poetries have to add to the field of comparative literature.

Notwithstanding the Arabic poetic modernists' ambition for change that al-Malāʾikah makes clear in *Shrapnel and Ashes*, the poets whose works I discuss below remain faithful to

[21] Al-Malāʾikah, *Shaẓāyā wa-ramād*, 7-10.

[22] Al-Malāʾikah, *Shaẓāyā wa-ramād*, 26.

many features of the premodern poetry Awad and al-Malāʾikah challenge them to break away from. While their poems are no longer columnar (*ʿamūdī*) or arranged in two-hemistich lines that all rhyme at the end as the premodern Arabic *qaṣīdah*, or ode, does, the modernists writing in Arabic initially retain parts of the old poetic meters in their new poetic forms.

To better understand what exactly the Arabic and Persian modernists do to distinguish their poetry from what came before, let us now turn to the first scientific analysis of Arabic prosody, which al-Khalīl ibn Aḥmad al-Farāhīdī (d. between 777 and 786) undertook in the eighth century. In the introductory material to an edition of *Kitāb al-ʿarūḍ* (*The Book of Prosody*) by the grammarian ʿAlī Abū al-Ḥasan al-Rabaʿī (d. 1029), the German Arabist Stephen Wild tells the traditional myth of how al-Khalīl came up with a way to illustrate Arabic metrical patterns with symbols.[23] The story goes that al-Khalīl was walking through the market in the southern Iraqi city of al-Baṣrah (Basra) when the rhythms of the blacksmiths' hammers inspired him to derive a method describing the various metrical patterns that existed in Arabic poetry. The elements of this system are worth mentioning now as I too will be using them to represent metrical feet in some of the Arabic and Persian poetry that comes later. Al-Khalīl's system is based on varied combinations of movent (*mutaḥarrik*) and quiescent (*sākin*) letters that combine into *tafʿīlāt* (s. *tafʿīlah*), metrical feet, which then come together in regular patterns to create the *bayt* (a line of poetry; pl. *abyāt*). These sub-units combine into *awzān* (s. *wazn*), or meters. The technical term for the science of Arabic prosody is *al-ʿarūḍ*,[24] a word that refers to the perfect versions of the *awzān*, which are also called *buḥūr* (s. *baḥr*), or seas, in their ideal forms. Wild

[23] Stephen Wild, "*Zur Geschichte der Arabischen Metrik*," Abū 'l-Ḥasan ʿAlī b. ʿIsā ar-Rabaʿī an-Naḥwī, *Kitāb al-ʿarūḍ*, Muḥammad Abū'l-Faḍl Badrān ed., *Bibliotheca Islamica*, Vol. 44 (Berlin: Das Arabische Buch, 2000), 9-16.

[24] For further information on Arabic metrics, see G. Weil and G. M. Meredith-Owens, "*ʿArūḍ*," *EI2*. Available: http://dx.doi.org/10.1163/1573-3912_islam_COM_0066.

specifically mentions two items in his discussion of al-Khalīl's achievement: his use of the Arabic letters *fāʾ* - *ʿayn* - *lām*—the three root letters from the verb *faʿala* (do; the noun form is *fiʿl*, or verb)—to represent the feet that make up poetic meters and his creation of the two-element classification system of movent and quiescent letters. Below, I take recourse to al-Khalīl's patterns for metrical feet to display how Iraqi and Iranian modernists went about changing the regular number of feet per line that had formally defined premodern Arabic and Persian poetry. To stick with Wild's example as a brief introduction to how al-Khalīl's metrical representations look, the *ṭawīl* (long) meter, in its ideal form (*baḥr*), looks like this, with " // " representing the caesura between the two hemistichs in a line:

faʿūlun mafāʿīlun faʿūlun mafāʿīlun // faʿūlun mafāʿīlun faʿūlun mafāʿīlun

These feet can also be represented by a system of long (¯) and short (˘) syllables like this, with " / " indicating the separation of feet and " // " the caesura:

˘ ¯ ¯ / ˘ ¯ ¯ ¯ / ˘ ¯ ¯ / ˘ ¯ ¯ ¯ // ˘ ¯ ¯ / ˘ ¯ ¯ ¯ / ˘ ¯ ¯ / ˘ ¯ ¯ ¯[25]

I use both systems below when describing the metrical elements of poetry in the interests of clarity for readers unfamiliar with the Arabic system. The Persians applied the Khalīlian system to their poetry after the Arabs invaded the Sasanian Empire (r. 224-651) in the seventh century, and I will also refer to al-Khalīl's metrical feet in my discussion of Persian poetry. Although the story of how al-Khalīl came to create his system is probably apocryphal, his derivation of a way to describe phenomena that already existed but had yet to be explained remains an admirable scientific achievement.

[25] For variants on the meter, see W. Wright, *A Grammar of the Arabic Language*, W. Robertson Smith and M.J. De Goeje eds., Vol. 2 (New Delhi: Munshiram Manoharlal Publishers, Pvt. Ltd., 2004 [1862]), 364.

Mirroring al-Khalīl's technique of creating the science of *ʿarūḍ* from an existing body of poetry, I build my theoretical model for understanding the transnational poetics of Iraqi and Iranian modernist poetry—that is, the process of how these poetries came to be through a shared transnational dynamic—by starting with the constituent elements of modernist poetry in either tradition: changing the shape of the poem upon the page from columnar monorhymes to lines of varying length with different or irregular rhymes; using ancient myth to symbolically talk about the present; and dealing with various Western influences in verse form. Along with presenting these shared features of Iraqi and Iranian modernism at the level of the text, I work to derive an overall theory of how and why these two traditions developed in such similar ways during their modernist periods.

Despite the continued presence of premodern Arabic metrics in both Arabic and Persian modernist poetry, it is absolutely clear that the twentieth century witnessed a sea change in the wake of the innovations the modernist poets made in both contexts. These changes rang in a new era but also preserved the richness of the poets' respective poetic traditions. Working in and around the period of European colonial domination and influence in the Near East, Iraqi and Iranian poets grappled with the weight of an age-old tradition anchored in the Arabic prosodic forms that had moored both Arabic and Persian poetry for centuries. While I do not plumb the depths of the metrical changes the modernists made as a number of other studies have already undertaken such analysis,[26] the story about the invention of the science of Arabic prosody

[26] On the metrical developments of modernist Arabic poetry, see Iḥsān ʿAbbās, *Ittijāhāt al-shiʿr al-ʿarabī al-muʿāṣir* (Kuwayt: al-Majlis al-Waṭānī li-l-Thaqāfah wa-l-Funūn wa-l-Adab, 1978); M.M. Badawi, *A critical introduction to Modern Arabic Poetry* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1975); Issa J. Boullata, "Badr Shakir al-Sayyab and the Free Verse Movement," *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 1, no. 3 (July, 1970): 248-258; Salma Khadra Jayyusi, *Trends and Movements in Modern Arabic Poetry*, 2 Vols., Studies in Arabic Literature: Supplements to the *Journal of Arabic Literature* [*JAL*], Vol. IV, M.M. Badawi et al. eds. (Leiden: Brill, 1977); Nāzik al-Malāʾikah, *Qaḍāyā al-shiʿr al-muʿāṣir* (Baghdād: Maktabat al-Nahḍah, 1967 [1962]); and Shmuel Moreh, *Modern Arabic Poetry 1800-1970: The Development of its Forms and Themes under the Influence of Western*

parallels my own analytical approach to the poetry in this dissertation. Like al-Khalīl, I begin with form, which grounds my comparative discussion of modernist poetry in Arabic and Persian.

Al-Malāʾikah, the other Iraqi modernists like al-Sayyāb, ʿAbd al-Wahhāb al-Bayātī (d.1999), Buland al-Ḥaydarī (d. 1996), Shādhil Ṭāqah (d. 1974), and others, along with the Persian modernist poets across the border in Iran such as Nīmā Yūshīj (d. 1960), Aḥmad Shāmlū (d. 2000), Furūgh Farrukhzād (d. 1967), and many more paid particular attention to the central place of premodern Arabic prosodic forms in their modernist experiments. When we look at their early modernist poetry, we find the older poetic feet still at the center of their rhythms, a phenomenon I explore at length in the chapters to follow. Although their poems continued to depend on the earlier Arabic poetic feet, Iranian and Arab modernist poets alike wrested the line of poetry away from the dominant two-hemistich monorhyme of the premodern period to create new poetic forms. These poets and their critics have debated how exactly these changes ought to take shape and how much of the old ought to remain in the new. Until now, for the most part, literary critics in both traditions have considered these developments to be the result of a political impulse among poets seeking to express themselves more fully in their own verse, beyond the limitations of past poetic conventions.[27] Eric Davis sums up the gist of these arguments when he

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Literature, Studies in Arabic Literature: Supplements to *JAL* 5, M.M. Badawi, P. Cachia, M.C. Lyons, J.N. Mattock, and J.T. Monroe eds. (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1976) . For the role of metrics in the Persian modernist tradition, see Amr Taher Ahmad, *La «Révolution littéraire»: Étude de l'influence de la poésie française sur la modernisation des formes poétiques persanes au début de XXe siècle* (Wien [Vienna]: Verlag der Österreichischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, 2012); Mahdī Akhavān Sālis [M. Umīd], *Bidʿat'hā va badāyiʿ-i Nīmā Yūshīj,* 1st ed. (Tihrān: Tūkā, 1357 [1978]); Yaḥyā Āryanpūr, *Az Ṣabā tā Nīmā: tarīkh-i 150 sāl-i adab-i Fārsī*, 5th ed. (Tihrān: Intishārāt-i Zavvār, 1372 [1993; 1350 (1971)]); and Ahmad Karimi-Hakkak, *Recasting Persian Poetry: Scenarios of Poetic Modernity in Iran* (London: Oneworld, 2012 [1995]). For a comparative study of modernist forms in each language, see Muḥammad Khāqānī and Rūḥallāh Maṭlabī, "*Buḥūr qaṣīdat al-tafʿīlah fī al-adabayn al-ʿarabī wa-l-fārisī*," *Buḥūth fī al-lughah al-ʿarabiyyah wa-ādābihā*, *Niṣf sanawiyyah li-qism al-ʿarabiyyah wa-ādābihā bi-jāmiʿat Iṣfahān* 1 (Pāyīz/Zamistān 1388 [Fall/Winter, 2009/2010]): 51-61.

[27] I am not suggesting that premodern Arabic poetry was limited by its formal requirements. Fakhreddine has recently argued for the consideration of the *muḥdathūn* poets who wrote during the Abbasid period as modernists in

writes that the poetry of the Arabic free verse pioneers "offered a critique of tradition that went far beyond poetry," concluding that "the Free Verse Movement, as well as all new literary, cultural, and artistic movements [in Iraq], must be seen in *political as well as aesthetic terms*."[28] Also discussing the Arabic tradition, Salma Khadra Jayyusi offers a nuanced view of the connection between the birth of the free verse movement and the 1948 Palestinian *Nakbah*[29] in her seminal study of modern Arabic poetry, but her ultimate conclusion aligns with Davis's position. She writes,

> The formal beginning of the movement of free verse [in 1949] must therefore be seen as an artistic phenomenon which succeeded because it was both artistically mature and timely in that it suited the historic and psychological moment in the Arab world. […] Because of the spiritual shock caused by the Palestine debacle of 1948, and the general mental, political and social energy it produced, the new poets were able to imbue their new form with finer poetic qualities and with more contemporaneous attitudes and visions.[30]

Jayyusi theorizes a direct link between the Arab military failure against Israel and the growing independence movements in the Arab world that followed, which in turn encouraged poets to "imbue their new form with finer poetic qualities and with more contemporaneous attitudes and visions."

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their own right in light of their self-conscious use of metapoesis and the innovations they introduced into the Arabic *qaṣīdah*. *Metapoesis in the Arabic Tradition*.

[28] *Memories of State: Politics, History, and Collective Identity in Modern Iraq* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005), 92-93. Italics mine.

[29] 15 May 1948, the date Israel was founded and hundreds of thousands of Palestinians were ethnically cleansed from their homes and land, is called the "catastrophe" in Arabic.

[30] *Trends and Movements in Modern Arabic Poetry*, 557-558.

The foremost critic of modern Persian poetry writing in English, Ahmad Karimi-Hakkak, explains that the methods Iranian critics used for approaching modernist poetry also resulted in specifically political readings. Therefore,

> a whole new interpretive culture emerged wherein poetry was read primarily with the purpose of deciphering the poet's political views, its abstractions and ambiguities attributed to a perennial case of absence of freedoms, particularly those relating to free expression of ideas through poetry.[31]

In Iran as well, political context defined contemporary critical models of understanding. The "new interpretive culture" then used these models dogmatically in its analyses, which sought to unveil the hidden political meanings of poems by "deciphering the poet's political views." In each tradition we therefore find the political spliced with the literary in both directions: modernist poetic forms change in tandem with political triumph and tragedy while the critical tradition dealing with that same poetry seeks out the political motivations underlying the texts.

I take up this politicized critical reception of Iraqi and Iranian modernist poetry in order to better understand the transnational links between the two contexts. While the impetus behind modernist poetry in each case has received ample critical attention, no studies have analyzed *why* poetic modernism developed so similarly in both traditions or the reasons behind their corresponding formal innovations and shared thematic content. Using a comparative approach and making connections between these traditions in both form and content, I link them together as the results of a transnational modernist imaginary. I thus attempt to write a chapter missing from the history of the planetary modernist movement.

Overall, I argue that Iraqi and Iranian modernist poetry cannot be fully understood within a paradigm of influence that situates Europe at the center of modernism and other traditions at

[31] *Recasting Persian Poetry*, 235.

the periphery. By accounting for the lateral transactions between Arabic and Persian poetry across the Iran-Iraq border, I explain how these two minor modernist traditions—let me instead say "marginalized" as I am not happy with the term "minor" to describe either Arabic or Persian literature[32]—come together as a transnational response to the undeniable influence European poetry had on the development of modernism. By taking a page from Dipesh Chakrabarty's *Provincializing Europe*[33] and resituating my critical lens to what are generally considered the margins of modernism, I challenge our current understanding of modernism as a movement that began in Europe and diffused across the world. Instead, I show that reorienting our focus to minor traditions and looking to lateral connections in local modernist form and content calls into question Europe as the single source of the planetary modernist movement.

While I here offer a new reading of the relationship of modernist Arabic and Persian poetries both to the political situations within which they emerged and to Europe, most previous scholarship on either case has tended to look at poetry only with regard to contemporary politics in the Near East. Often, scholars have allowed political situations or certain poets' positions on politics to define approaches to their poetry rather than finding a balance between text and context. Many earlier studies of my subjects focus solely on relating contemporary political contexts to the poetry produced within them or offer straightforward biographical analysis of poets' bodies of work and their connections to their lives. In recent years, scholars have begun to situate poetry within an ongoing dialectic between text and context, providing me with some guidelines for my own methodology.

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[32] Cf. Friedman's critique of Lionnet and Shih's use of the term. *Planetary Modernisms*, 152.

[33] *Postcolonial Thought and Historical Difference* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2000). In this book, Chakrabarty challenges our conception of Europe as the source and center of political modernity while never ignoring the foundational place of European thought in the development of political modernity in other areas of the globe.

In order to think in new ways about the interaction of text and context in Iraqi and Iranian modernism, I have decided to take up the work of the most well-known modernist pioneers in either tradition below. In the majority of cases, I have chosen to analyze their most prominent collections of verse. Furthermore, in order to provide sustained readings of individual poems, I have decided to limit my overall engagements with these poets' bodies of work to poems that both represent their overall *œuvre*s and best exemplify the transnational poetics in which I am interested. While many of these poets have been dealt with at length in previous scholarship, little to no transnational comparative analysis has been done about Iraqi and Iranian modernist poetry. My study intervenes to fill this gap in scholarship.

The dissertation thus engages the broader critical traditions on Arabic and Persian modernist poetry. Looking first to the Arabic tradition, there is a wealth of scholarship on poetic modernism in both English and Arabic. As far as the two poets whose works I analyze at length, initial studies focused on their move from Romanticism to modernism, which Salma Khadra Jayyusi suggests is exemplified by Badr Shākir al-Sayyāb's second *dīwān*, *Asāṭīr* (*Myths*, 1950), and ʿAbd al-Wahhāb al-Bayātī's second *dīwān*, *Abārīq muhashshamah* (*Broken Pitchers*, 1954).[34] However, there is contention on this point. M.M. Badawi writes that, other than two poems in the collection, al-Sayyāb's *Myths* revolves around the theme of love and that "on the whole, they are fairly stereotyped romantic poems."[35] Badawi goes on to mention al-Sayyāb's turn to "socially and politically committed poetry" in the early 1950s, giving al-Sayyāb's three long poems as examples: *Ḥaffār al-qubūr* ("The Grave Digger," 1952), *al-Mūmis al-ʿamyāʾ*

[34] Jayyusi, *Trends and Movements*, 558-560.

[35] *A critical introduction*, 251.

("The Blind Prostitute," 1954) and *al-Asliḥah wa-l-atfāl* ("Weapons and Children," 1954).[36] Despite al-Sayyāb's break with his Romantic period in these long poems, critics have paid little attention to them. Badawi criticizes them outright, claiming that "Sayyab was unable to write a long poem that is free from structural weaknesses." He goes on to argue that these works represent the poet's naïveté and his "inordinate interest in the erotic and the sensual." Moreover, Badawi contends that al-Sayyāb's mythological allusions in these poems "are on the whole of a superficial nature."[37] Terri DeYoung has challenged this view with her detailed analysis of "The Blind Prostitute," in which she reads al-Sayyāb's indigenization of Western epic poetry, and narrative poetry in particular, as a challenge to continued British meddling in Iraqi politics during the 1950s.[38] Scholars have mostly ignored al-Sayyāb's two other long poems.[39] However, because they come from the same period as "The Blind Prostitute," they offer further opportunities for delving into al-Sayyāb's early Communist affiliation and his interaction with the Western poetic tradition.

While al-Sayyāb openly broke with the Communists later in his career and in 1961 "launched a venomous attack on Marxist commitment" at a conference on modern Arabic

[36] Badawi, *A critical introduction*, 252.

[37] Badawi, *A critical introduction*, 252.

[38] Terri DeYoung, *Placing the Poet: Badr Shakir al-Sayyab and Postcolonial Iraq* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1998), 251. Davis uses DeYoung's analysis of "The Blind Prostitute"—"a complex work filled with stylistic and political ambiguities"—to counter the Iraqi Baʿthist scholar Mājid al-Sāmarrāʾī's citation of the same poem "to demonstrate the poet's move toward Pan-Arabism in 1954." *Memories of State*, 210.

[39] Mohammad Salama has written a short article on "The Gravedigger," in which he approaches the poem from a psychoanalytic perspective. "A 'Salary' of Death: Aesthetics and Economy in Badr Shākir al-Sayyāb's 'Ḥaffār al-Qubūr' ('The Gravedigger')," *JAL* 37, no. 2 (2006): 190-205.

literature in Rome,[40] his Iraqi compatriot ʿAbd al-Wahhāb al-Bayātī remained staunchly committed to Communist ideals throughout his life. Al-Bayātī's early poetic career parallels al-Sayyāb's as he too moved from Romanticism to free verse as a young poet. DeYoung brings up a prominent instance in their poetic relationship in her discussion of what she refers to as al-Bayātī's *muʿāraḍah* (a poem in conversation with a previous one, whether in rhyme, meter, and/or theme)[41] of al-Sayyāb's 1948 *Fī al-sūq al-qadīm* ("In the Ancient Market"), titled *Sūq al-qaryah* ("The Village Market," 1952).[42] Addressing the critic Iḥsān ʿAbbās's response to al-Bayātī's take on al-Sayyāb's theme—in which he argues that al-Bayātī's verse represents an innovation in content, beyond al-Sayyāb's formal innovation[43]—DeYoung proposes that this *muʿāraḍah*

> sounded the death knell for the old consensus of Arab romanticism about the innate homology between the voice of the (solipsistic) self and the voice of the other. Now this identification would become increasingly problematized, emerging as a site of contention and struggle that would occupy much of the energy of Arabic poetry in the next decade.[44]

Not long after, al-Bayātī published his second collection of poetry, *Broken Pitchers*, which was also his first major contribution to the burgeoning modernist Arabic poetic movement.

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[40] Badawi, *A critical introduction*, 209. Al-Sayyāb's comments are found in "*al-Iltizām wa-l-lāiltizām fi al-adab al-ʿarabī al-ḥadīth*," *al-Adab al-ʿarabī al-muʿāṣir: aʿmāl muʾtamar Rūmā al-munʿaqid fī Tishrīn al-awwal sanat 1961* (Manshūrāt Aḍwāʾ, 1961), 239-255.

[41] A. Schippers, "*Muʿāraḍa*," *EI2*. http://dx.doi.org/10.1163/1573-3912_islam_SIM_5276.

[42] DeYoung's analysis is on 216-220 of *Placing the Poet*.

[43] *Ittijāhāt al-shiʿr al-ʿarabī al-muʿāṣir*, 56. Passage translated in DeYoung, *Placing the Poet*, 219.

[44] DeYoung, *Placing the Poet*, 220. Parentheses in original.

There are many volumes of criticism on al-Bayātī in Arabic.[45] In 2001, Suzanne Pinckney Stetkevych edited a special issue of the *Journal of Arabic Literature* devoted to al-Bayātī, *Perhaps a Poet is Born, or Dies*, titled after a line from his 1966 collection *Alladhī yaʾtī wa-lā yaʾtī* (*He Who Comes and Does Not Come*). Several of the included articles deal with al-Bayātī's use of poetic masks,[46] with some focusing in particular on his invocation of the Persian poet ʿUmar al-Khayyām.[47] In an earlier analysis also found in *JAL*, Aida Azouqa reads al-Bayātī's use of the Khayyām mask as a gesture to Sufism (that is, Islamic mysticism). She explains that al-Bayātī "frequently adds a religious dimension to his revolutionary poetic masks that suggests the attributes of a Sufi spiritual quest."[48] Following her study of al-Bayātī's mythical and intertextual references as well as his use of poetic masks, Azouqa concludes, "Such a complexity, *without pointless ambiguity*, engages the reader in serious and challenging investigations of the poems. Indeed, al-Bayyātī's poetry derives its power from its potential for

[45] Of particular interest are al-Bayātī's own comments on his poetry in *Tajribatī al-shiʿriyyah*, 1st ed. (Bayrūt: Manshūrāt Nizār al-Qabbānī, 1968) and ʿAzīz al-Sayyid Jāsim's analysis of commitment and Sufism in al-Bayātī's poetry in *al-Iltizām wa-l-taṣawwuf fī shiʿr ʿAbd al-Wahhāb al-Bayātī*, 1st ed. (Baghdād: Dār al-Shuʾūn al-Thaqāfiyyah al-ʿĀmmah, Āfāq ʿArabiyyah, 1990).

[46] Issa J. Boullata, "The Masks of ʿAbd al-Wahhāb al-Bayātī," *JAL* 32, no. 2 (2001): 107-118; Muhsin Jassim al-Musawi, "ʿAbd al-Wahhāb al-Bayātī's Poetics of Exile," *JAL* 32, no. 2 (2001): 212-238. Al-Musawi extends his analysis in "Engaging Tradition in Modern Arab Poetics," *JAL* 33, no. 2 (2002): 172-210. Musawi also includes scattered comments on the use of masks in Arabic poetry generally, and al-Bayātī's masks in particular, in *Arabic Poetry: Trajectories of modernity and tradition*, Routledge Studies in Middle Eastern Literature, James E. Montgomery et. al. eds. (New York: Routledge, 2006), *passim*. It was al-Bayātī himself who coined the term *qināʿ* (mask) as an Arabic poetic device in *Tajribatī al-shiʿriyyah*, 35. See Muḥammad ʿAlī Kindī, *al-Ramz wa-l-qināʿ fī al-shiʿr al-ʿarabī al-ḥadīth* (*al-Sayyāb wa-Nāzik wa-l-Bayātī*) (Bayrūt: Dār al-Kitāb al-Jadīd al-Muttaḥidah, 2003), 69.

[47] Saadi A. Simawe, "The Lives of the Sufi Masters in ʿAbd al-Wahhāb al-Bayātī's Poetry," *JAL* 32, no. 2 (2001): 119-141 and Aida O. Azouqa, "Defamiliarization in the Poetry of ʿAbd al-Wahhāb al-Bayātī and T.S. Eliot: A Comparative Study," *JAL* 32, no. 2 (2001): 167-211.

[48] "Al-Bayyātī [*sic*] and W.B. Yeats as Mythmakers: A Comparative Study," *JAL* 30, no. 3 (1999), 260.

offering the reader new discoveries after subsequent readings […]."[49] Although Azouqa notes that al-Bayātī invokes al-Khayyām as a revolutionary figure,[50] she does not explore the possibility that al-Bayātī engages with the figure of al-Khayyām as a representative of materialist, rather than metaphysical, philosophy, choosing instead to ignore the central role ambiguity plays in al-Bayātī's work. Another feature of al-Bayātī's poetry that Azouqa leaves out of her analysis is his choice to set many of his later poems in Iranian cities, such as his inclusion of Nishapur in *He Who Comes and Does Not Come*. The strength of Azouqa's argument lies in her sustained analysis of his poetry's basis in the mythological cycle of death and rebirth, the symbolic mode pioneered by T.S. Eliot fundamental to the planetary modernist movement.[51]

Al-Bayātī looks eastward to Iran and its cultural centers such as Isfahan and Shiraz for revolutionary and mystical inspiration during his middle and later periods, transnationally engaging the Persian historical, mythic, and poetic traditions. But despite al-Bayātī's transnational perspective, al-Sayyāb's two trying sojourns on the run in Iran during the early 1950s, and the Iranian modernists' intricate development of premodern Arabic poetic forms, only a handful of studies take up Arabic and Persian modernist poetry from a comparative perspective. One short paper in Persian offers a brief comparison of al-Sayyāb's and Nīmā

[49] Azouqa, "Al-Bayyātī and W.B. Yeats," 285. Italics added.

[50] Azouqa, "Al-Bayyātī and W.B. Yeats," 270.

[51] "Owing to Eliot's influence," Azouqa writes, "al-Bayyātī's allusions to myths in the poems of 1954-1965 allowed him to make a smooth transition from a poet who merely alludes to myths to a mythmaker himself." "Al-Bayyātī and W.B. Yeats," 259.

Yūshīj's innovations on form and content[52] and another (written in Arabic but by Iranian scholars) analyzes Persian and Arabic poetic modernism with regard to prosody.[53] These brief studies do not consist of much critical analysis, instead making somewhat superficial comparisons of particular lines of poetry in either tradition. However, there are at least three other articles by Iranian scholars offering more insightful literary critical approaches to the modernist connections between Nīmā's and al-Sayyāb's poetry[54] and the concurrent growth of modernism in Arabic and Persian.[55] In English, Yaseen Noorani's dissertation, "Visionary Politics: Self, Community and Colonialism in Arabic and Persian Neoclassical Poetry,"[56] compares Arabic and Persian poetry, though it stops prior to the modernist period. In Arabic, al-Malāʾikah deals with the influence of the Persian *band* (a poetic form that relies on repetitions of the poetic foot [*al-tafʿīlah*] rather than the traditional two hemistichs) in her book *Qaḍāyā al-shiʿr al-muʿāṣir* (*Issues in Contemporary Poetry*). Jayyusi, in her discussion of al-Malāʾikah's work, writes, "*Band*s, then, may be considered as a form of versified prose ('*nathr manẓūm*')

[52] ʿAlīriżā Muḥammad Riżāʾī and Sumayyah Āramāt, "*Barrasī-'i taṭbīqī-'i ashʿār-i Badr Shākir va Nīmā Yūshīj*," *Adabiyyāt-i taṭbīqī* 6, (Tābistān, 1387 [Summer, 2008]): 161-173.

[53] Muḥammad Khāqānī and Rūḥallāh Maṭlabī, "*Buḥūr qaṣīdat al-tafʿīlah fī al-adabayn al-ʿarabī wa-l-fārisī*," *Buḥūth fī al-lughah al-ʿarabiyyah wa-ādābihā*, *Niṣf sanawiyyah li-qism al-ʿarabiyyah wa-ādābihā bi-jāmiʿat Iṣfahān* 1 (Pāyīz/Zamistān 1388 [Fall/Winter, 2009/2010]): 51-61.

[54] Farhād Rajabī, "*Marg-i zindagī-bakhsh dar shiʿr-i Badr Shākir al-Sayyāb va Nīmā Yūshīj*," Adab-i ʿArabī 3, no. 2 (Pāyīz, 1390 [Fall, 2011]): 185-206 and, in Arabic, Muḥammad Jaʿfar Aṣgharī and Nargis Ganjī, *Tajalliyyāt al-intiẓār fī qaṣīdatay "Unshūdat al-maṭar" wa-"Dārūg" li-Badr Shākir al-Sayyāb wa-Nīmā Yūshīj* (*dirāsah muqāranah*), *Faṣliyyat al-lisān al-mubīn (buḥūth fī al-adab al-ʿArabī)* 4, no. 10 (Shitāʾ, 1391 [Winter, 2012/2013]): 21-37.

[55] Mahdī Mumtaḥan and Mihīn Ḥājī Zādah, *Barrasī-'i sayr-i taḥavvul-i shiʿr-i naw dar zabān-i ʿarabī va fārsī*, *Muṭāliʿāt-i adabiyyāt-i taṭbīqī* 5, no. 16: 153-180.

[56] University of Chicago, 1997.

written in Iraq, probably in imitation of similar Persian art forms."[57] She then links the *band* directly to Arabic free verse, claiming that

> [t]he metrical freedom achieved in the *bands* is the same freedom enjoyed by the modern free-verse poet. There is no doubt that, apart from some early, isolated and probably chance creations of metrical compositions enjoying a similar kind of freedom, the *band* is the first sustained though inadvertent experiment with liberated metre.[58]

Jayyusi does not, however, offer any solid evidence of the Persian *band*'s influence on Arabic poetry.

Kamran Rastegar has more recently given some waypoints for the comparative study of Arabic and Persian prose in his *Literary Modernity between the Middle East and Europe*.[59] Rastegar's approach to modernity and the complicated relationship that exists among conceptions of modernity, ideology, and politics is refreshing. "Speaking of modernity," he writes, "is not unlike speaking of the divine—the concept adheres through a faith in its object, but nonetheless is continually contested by divergent interpretations, different narratives."[60] He goes on to challenge what he sees as the "reified category" of modernity prevalent in academia,[61] something that derives from what he considers to be "the overpoliticization of literature."[62] Rastegar's comments on this "overpoliticization," echoing those of Karimi-Hakkak in *Recasting Persian Poetry*, guide my own critical framework, in which I understand literature and politics as

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[57] Jayyusi, *Trends and Movements*, 555.

[58] Jayyusi, *Trends and Movements*, 556.

[59] *Textual transactions in nineteenth-century Arabic, English, and Persian literatures*, Routledge Studies in Middle Eastern Literatures, James E. Montgomery et al. eds. (New York: Routledge, 2007).

[60] Rastegar, *Textual transactions*, 11.

[61] Rastegar, *Textual transactions*, 11.

[62] Rastegar, *Textual transactions*, 19-26.

parts of a discursive system that participate in a dialectic with each other. Rastegar argues against using a simple dichotomy of traditionalism and modernism in literary criticism and points out that "postcolonial scholars have tended to emphasize questions of ideological and political orientation and influence, in evaluating modern literatures." Due to the prevalence of this approach, there has been "an overemphasis of the centrality of these issues to the aesthetic dimension of the innovation of literary practices in the modern period, as well as to the understanding of changes to the practice and value of reading."[63] Overall, Rastegar's comparative study of Arabic and Persian prose provides a practical model for my own project of reading these two literatures transnationally, though I focus on a later period and on poetry rather than prose.

As far as scholarship about modern Persian poetry goes, the critical tradition largely mirrors what we find in the Arabic one. Initially, the old guard wrote off, for instance, Nīmā's poetic innovations as a passing fad, or worse,[64] but he has since garnered an enormous amount of critical attention in his own country. Regarding studies in English, early this century Karimi-Hakkak and Kamran Talattof edited a number of critical articles collected in a volume titled *Essays on Nima Yushij*.[65] Despite the harsh critical reaction he faced from the traditionalists at the beginning of his career, Nīmā eventually established himself as the wellspring of *shiʿr-i naw* (New Poetry), and critics looked to his verse as representative of contemporary political

[63] Rastegar, *Textual transactions*, 19.

[64] For a brief summary of traditionalist reactions to Nīmā's non-traditional poetry, see Karimi-Hakkak, *Recasting Persian Poetry*, 5.

[65] *Animating Modernism in Persian Poetry*, Ahmad Karimi-Hakkak and Kamran Talattof eds. (Leiden: Brill, 2004).

developments in Iran. This approach can be found in, among others,[66] Hamid Dabashi's analysis of Nīmā's work in his article "Nima Yushij and the Constitution of a National Subject,"[67] in which he presents his take on Nīmā's poetic vision. "He imagined his nation from the very depth of its poetic defiance," Dabashi writes. "He re/subjected a nation against its colonial predicament, giving back its citizens their denied historical agency."[68] In the same article, Dabashi offers a reading and translation of *Quqnūs* ("The Phoenix"; Dabashi translates it "Sphinx" without giving an explanation why), showing how Nīmā conceives of the poet—himself, that is—as "a solitary bird who gives the good news and keeps the hope for salvation to come."[69] This bird imagery symbolizing escape or freedom is central not just to Nīmā's early modernist poetry[70] but for all the modernist projects I deal with. Dabashi situates *Quqnūs* within his overall argument about Nīmā, concluding that the poem's

> image of sacrifice and rejuvenation, constitutional to the revolutionary romanticism of Nima's disposition, sustains the earliest phase of his poetry. As the reign of Reza Shah sets in, this revolutionary romanticism sustains not just Nima but a whole generation of cultural architects of Iranian modernity.[71]

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[66] For example see Majid Naficy's analysis of Nīmā's "*Quqnūs*" ("The Phoenix") in his dissertation, "Modernism and ideology in Persian literature: A return to nature in the poetry of Nima Yushij" (University of California, Los Angeles, 1996), 77-80.

[67] *The World is My Home: A Hamid Dabashi Reader*, Andrew Davison and Himadeep Muppidi eds. (New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction Publishers, 2011), 147-186.

[68] Dabashi, *The World is My Home*, 148.

[69] Dabashi, *The World is My Home*, 162.

[70] From the same period, we also have "*Ghurāb*" ("The Crow"; 1316 [1938]), "*Murgh-i gham*" ("The Bird of Sorrow"; 1317 [1938]), "*Shikastah par*" ("Broken Winged"; 1319 [1940/41]), and "*Jughdī pīr*" ("An Old Owl"; 1320 [1941]). See Nīmā Yūshīj, *Majmuʿah-'i kāmil-i ashʿār-i Nīmā Yūshīj: Fārsī va Ṭabarī*, (Tihrān: Intishārāt-i Nigāh, 1370 [1991]), 224-225, 225-227, 286-287, and 301.

[71] Dabashi, *The World is My Home*, 165. Dabashi's argument hinges on the date of the poem's composition, which he gives as 1927 (see 162 of *The World is My Home*). In Nīmā's *Majmūʿah*, which I depend on here, the date is given as Bahman 1316 (January/February 1938). Majid Naficy gives February, 1938 in his dissertation. "Modernism and ideology," 76. "*Quqnūs*" therefore comes towards the end of Reza Shah's reign; he abdicated in 1941. While I agree with Dabashi that we can read the poem as Nīmā's commentary on modernity, I do not think a specifically political reading is necessary. In fact, the noteworthy ambiguity and ambivalence of modernist poetry in the Arabic

Picking up where he left off with Nīmā, Dabashi also focuses on the relationship between Aḥmad Shāmlū's poetry and the constitution of the Iranian subject. "Ahmad Shamlu," Dabashi and Golriz Dahdel argue, "gave that subject and the agency of its morality the powerful contingency of a future and thus the possibility of hope. As Nima imagined and delivered the Iranian subject as a historical agent, Ahmad Shamlu gave it a future to imagine."[72] Dabashi and Dahdel also provide some insights into Shāmlū's move from Romantic to committed (*muta'ahhid*) poetry with the publication of his second collection, *Qaṭ'nāmah* (*Manifesto*) in 1951, which they see as an extension of the poetic space Nīmā opened up.[73] Additionally, Samad Alavi includes a chapter on Shāmlū in his 2013 dissertation, "The Poetics of Commitment in Modern Persian: A Case of Three Revolutionary Poets in Iran."[74] Alavi argues that Shāmlū represents the "mainstream view in the commitment debate in Persian literature" and explores how Shāmlū's "deeply pessimistic historical view" works to complicate the overarching "humanist commitment" of his poetry.[75] Alavi focuses on Shāmlū's poetry after the publication of his ground-breaking 1957 collection *Havā-yi tāzah* (*Fresh Air*), and especially on that volume's *Shi'rī kih zindagīst* ("A Poetry That Is Life"), which "presents itself as a radical rupture in the Persian poetic tradition […], stak[ing] its claim as heir to the poetry of Nima Yushij

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and Persian traditions betrays more about the complicated "architecture" of modernity in Iran and Iraq than directly political readings ever could. Solely political readings usually tell us more about their authors than their subjects.

[72] Hamid Dabashi and Golriz Dahdel, "Ahmad Shamlu and the Contingency of Our Future," *Intellectual Trends in Twentieth-Century Iran: A Critical Survey*, Negin Nabavi ed. (Gainesville, FL: University Press of Florida, 2003), 53.

[73] Dabashi and Dahdel, "Ahmad Shamlu and the Contingency of Our Future," 63.

[74] University of California, Berkeley, 90-121.

[75] Alavi, "The Poetics of Commitment," 92.

[…].”[76] On the other hand, in his analysis of Shāmlū’s overall poetics, Alavi notes that Shāmlū, a conscious follower of Nīmā’s precedent, “more often wrote with a vague, even surreal language that could remain inaccessible to the uninitiated” in a continuation of Nīmā’s use of “a poetic language known as ‘social symbolism’”. Because this type of language is founded in veiled allusions to socio-political conditions intended to trick the censor, Alavi argues that its coded symbolism often undermines its social import. Although she may avoid the censor, “the poet also runs the risk that the symbols’ predetermined political meanings will also remain incomprehensible to the intended audience.”[77] I follow this line of inquiry in Shāmlū’s earlier work, investigating how his poetry changed after his move from Romanticism to political commitment.

Another of Nīmā’s poetic descendants, Furūgh Farrukhzād, took Persian poetic modernism in a different direction. Michael Hillman considers Farrukhzād’s personal struggle against male patriarchy in her poetry, writing that “in the mid-1960s, Farrokhzād did not have the time to engage dilettantishly in the world of public and exclusively male politics. Hers was a more serious, elemental political struggle for her own identity.”[78] In her continuation and development of the themes and formal features first pioneered by Nīmā, Farrukhzād—in the latter half of her career—created a poetics firmly anchored in modernism. However, the majority of studies on the poet have focused on her role as a woman in the typically male sphere of Persian poetry.[79] In contradistinction to these analyses, my interest lies in her unique approach to

[76] Alavi, “The Poetics of Commitment,” 101.

[77] Alavi, “The Poetics of Commitment,” 102.

[78] *A Lonely Woman*, 46.

[79] Dylan Olivia Oehler-Stricklin, “‘And This is I:’ The Power of the Individual in the Poetry of Forugh Farrokhzâd,” PhD diss., The University of Texas at Austin, 2005; Haideh Ghomi, “Female identity in the poetry of Forugh

and continuation of the modernist forms and themes pioneered by Nīmā. Indeed, her contemporary Shāmlū uses the motif of death and rebirth in a way quite different than she does. Farrukhzād fully engages the cycle of death and rebirth in one of her later poems, "Let Us Believe in the Beginning of the Cold Season." Previous scholarship has pointed out how the first line in this poem, "*va īn manam*" ("And this is me"), leads to a reading of the poem "as an open declaration of [Farrukhzād's] maturation, of her attaining unto an understanding of the world, an understanding of the 'earth's contaminated existence', and of her self; of her 'impotence' as 'a lonely woman' at the beginning of a cold season."[80] Hillman also reads the poem as exemplary of how Farrukhzād incorporates her personal experiences into her work. "One of Farrokhzād's longest and most pensive poems," he writes, "it begins with a speaker's very personal and individual declaration that implies a whole life behind it".[81] There is not, however, an analysis of this poem's place in the history of modernist Persian poetry, Farrukhzād's use of mythic themes as its structural basis, or its transnational connections to the planetary modernist movement. I contend that a transnational approach linking Farrukhzād's poetic masterpiece with her Iranian forebears and situating it in relation to similar works in the European tradition shows her to be the heiress to Nīmā's legacy in Persian poetry.

Farrokhzad," *Identità e appartenenza in Medio Oriente*, Marta Petricioli and Albert Tonini eds. (Florence: Università di Firenze, Dipartimento di Studi sullo Stato, 1998), 207-214; John Zubizarreta, "The Woman Who Sings No, No, No: Love, Freedom, and Rebellion in the Poetry of Forugh Farrokhzad," *World Literature Today* 66, no. 3 (Summer, 1992): 421-426; and Farzaneh Milani, "Conflicts between traditional roles and poetry in the work of Forugh Farrokhzod," *Women and the family in Iran*, Asghar Fathi ed. (Leiden: Brill, 1985), 226-237. See also Farzaneh Milani's criticism of earlier approaches to Farrukhzād's work in "Love and Sexuality in the poetry of Forugh Farrokhzad: a reconsideration," *Iranian Studies* 15, (1982): 117-128.

[80] Leila Rahimi Bahmany, "Bewildered Mirror: Mirror, Self, and World in the Poems of Forugh Farrokhzād," *Forugh Farrokhzad: Poet of Modern Iran, Iconic Woman and Feminine Pioneer of New Persian Poetry*, Dominic Parviz Brookshaw and Nasrin Rahimieh eds. (New York: I.B. Tauris, 2010), 74.

[81] Hillman, *A Lonely Woman*, 125.

Therefore, I compare the quite distinct approaches of Shāmlū, whose transnationalism is located in his Communist sympathies and hopes that literature will spark revolution, and Farrukhzād, whose more nuanced, contemplative modernist masterpiece reaches the limits of where Nīmāic poetry can go. While Shāmlū's transnationalism appears in the content of the *Manifesto* with its clarion call to the oppressed across the globe, Farrukhzād's, while certainly no less central to her poetry, lies beneath the surface, emerging in subtle intertextual and thematic connections to earlier Persian poetry and European modernism. The sharp contrast between the transnational features of Shāmlū's and Farrukhzād's poetry accentuates the various ways in which transnationalism has played a constitutive part in modernist Persian poetry.

With its analytical focus on the role of transnationalism in modern Arabic and Persian poetry, this dissertation brings together recent critical trends that attempt to re-evaluate the relationship of these poetries with the contexts of their composition. By investigating the emergence of modernism in both traditions and dealing with their parallel development of content (mythical themes and the centrality of the death/rebirth cycle in particular) and form (innovating on the dual hemistich; losing the monorhyme; and creating new poetic meters based on the *taf*ʿ*īlah* instead of the *bayt*), I analyze how Arabic and Persian modernisms transacted with each other across the Iraqi-Iranian border. I account for lateral transactions between these two minor modernist traditions and I argue that by employing a transnational paradigm of understanding we can call into question Europe's location at the origin of the planetary modernist movement.

> Ever since [Louis Awad] returned to Egypt at the age of twenty-five, he has been cut off from inspiration, for Karl Marx has finished him off (*ajhaza ʿalayhi Kārl Mārks*). From the myriad colors of death and life, he only sees one. Grass has turned red before him, the skies red, sand, water, women's bodies, men's words, and even thought itself have turned the color of blood before him. Even sounds, scents, and tastes have turned to red around him, as though the whole universe has been consumed by a terrible fire. He is content to live amidst this fire, for anyone who has seen the chains ripping through the bodies of slaves can think of nothing but red freedom (*lam yufakkir illā fī al-ḥurriyyah al-ḥamrāʾ*).
>
> - Louis Awad, *Plutoland*[82]

By the time Awad returned to Egypt from his studies at Cambridge, the world had turned red before his eyes. He and many other Arab and Iranian modernist poets frequently associated themselves with the Communist movements in their own countries. If they did not, these movements just as often claimed them as fellow travelers. Awad and the other modernists thus participated in the debates over literary commitment that went on in the Arab world and Iran at the middle of the twentieth century. Awad brazenly takes up the Marxist cause in the above passage, concluding the introduction to *Plutoland* with his declaration that "anyone who has seen the chains ripping through the bodies of slaves can think of nothing but red freedom." He wrote these words in 1947, when Egypt was still governed by a monarchy within a British sphere of influence. It would be another five years before the disillusionment caused by the Palestinian *Nakbah* in 1948 and growing anti-monarchical and anti-imperial sentiment in Egypt led to the 1952 Free Officers Revolution, which overthrew the monarchy and instituted, finally, Egyptian self-rule. Other independence movements would soon follow across the Arab world, including Iraq, as we will see later in my treatment of al-Sayyāb's life and poetry.

[82] ʿAwaḍ, *Blūtūlānd*, 26-27. Awad writes about himself in the third person throughout the introduction, perhaps in an attempt to distance himself somewhat from the provocative ideas he proposes within it. Cf. Isstaif's translation of the same passage in "Forging a New Self," 162.

The year leading up to the *Nakbah* was pivotal in the history of Arabic literature as during it the esteemed Dean of Arabic Literature Ṭāhā Ḥusayn introduced the French philosopher Jean-Paul Sartre's (d. 1980) literary *engagement* (commitment) to the readers of his journal *al-Kātib al-Miṣrī* (*The Egyptian Writer*). Sartre's manifesto about the relationship of politics and literature and the necessity of the writer's commitment, which he titled *Qu'est-ce qu'écrire?* ("What is Writing?" [1947]),[83] set off a flurry of activity in literary circles across the planet as writers struggled to make sense of how literature and politics fit together. His theory's transnational movement into Arab literary circles, and later into Iranian ones, occurred alongside the establishment and growth of local Communist organizations throughout the Near and Middle East. I invoke the term "transnational" here to describe both the introduction of Sartre's literary *engagement* and the development of Communism because I want to reorient our conception of anti-colonial activity in the Near East—particularly that of the modernist poets I discuss below—away from nationalist paradigms of understanding. These poets looked not only to their own poetic traditions for revolutionary inspiration but also to their colonizers and other subjected peoples. Even when they explicitly attempted to situate their poetry within a rubric of nationalist literature (al-Sayyāb, for instance, tried to do just this after his break with the Communists), modernist poetry's innate transnational makeup challenges such one-dimensional categorization should we consider this poetry in terms of its aesthetics rather than as a mirror held up to society. While I do not discount the importance of the nation as the locus of anti-colonial and anti-imperial organization, I look to the transnational in terms of transnational solidarities—in this

[83] *"What is Literature?" and Other Essays*, introduction by Steven Ungar (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1988), 25-47.

case, shared techniques of poetic modernism that moved across national borders and did not necessarily originate in Europe.

Ḥusayn's engagement with Sartre is but one example of these exchanges that take place beyond the bounds of the nation, and it is a crucial moment in the history of Arabic literature during the twentieth century. In what follows, I present the primary points of Sartre's argument and then trace how debates over commitment developed in the Arab world and Iran before zeroing in on the connection between these debates and the transnational nature of modernist poetry in the Near East, current transnational approaches to literature, and where my study intervenes in discussions about world literature.

We might consider all literature to be somehow committed, whether due to the author's explicit commitment of her writing to a political cause or, should we understand literature to be autonomous, its implicit deference to the status quo. I will deal with how we might understand committed literature in detail later, but for now Sartre's theory and its movement through Arab and Iranian intellectual circles opens up a number of issues central to the development of modern Arabic and Persian literature. Let us first, therefore, account for how writers in the Near East understood commitment. "The 'committed' writer," Sartre tells us, "knows that words are action." The committed writer *uses* language; she turns her text into a tool of 'disclosure' she then uses to change the world as it is.[84] In the same essay, Sartre makes what Raymond Williams calls an "artificial distinction between poetry and prose"[85] when he writes that the poet, who "refuse[s] to *utilize* language," "withdraw[s] from language-instrument in a single movement.

[84] Sartre, *"What is Literature?"* 37.

[85] Raymond Williams, *Marxism and Literature*, Marxist Introductions, Steven Lukes ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977), 202.

Once and for all he has chosen the poetic attitude which considers words as things and not as signs."[86] Prose thus functions as a *tool*; writers—especially politically committed writers—*use* prose to some other purpose, not for the sake of the words themselves. Prose is, to use the Heideggerean terminology upon which Sartre implicitly relied, ready-at-hand.[87] But poetry, which according to Sartre "considers words as things and not as signs," is an end in itself. Poetry requires contemplation. It does not immediately offer itself up for some purpose other than what it is. Poetry is, in Heidegger's terminology, *unhandy*, forcing us to confront it head on, unconnected from any context of use (at least at first).[88] Poetry must initially be considered present-at-hand. While I agree with Williams that Sartre's separation of prose and poetry is

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[86] Sartre, *"What is Literature?"* 29. Italics in original.

[87] Sartre's long engagement with Martin Heidegger's *Sein und Zeit* (*Being and Time*, 1927) was foundational for his thought. His theory of literary commitment, and particularly his distinction between poetry and prose, develops out of Heidegger's categories for understanding objects: either in terms of their *Zuhandenheit* (handiness; readiness-to-hand) or *Vorhandenheit* (objective presence; presence-at-hand). As I am referring to Joan Stambaugh's translation, I have included her translations along with the more frequently used terms "readiness-to-hand" and "presence-at-hand." For instances of each of these terms in *Being and Time*, see Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, SUNY Series in Contemporary Continental Philosophy, Dennis J. Schmidt ed., Joan Stambaugh trans., revised and with a foreword by Dennis J. Schmidt (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 2010), 439 and 453. Fredric Jameson offers the following by way of defining Heidegger's terms in plain English. For Heidegger, there are "two essential modes of the perception of objects: as *vorhanden*, simply there, inert and disconnected, and as *zuhanden*, or as action latent, tools and instruments lying ready to hand in case of need." *Marxism and Form: Twentieth-Century Dialectical Theories of Literature* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1974), 234. As Heidegger puts it, "That which is handy (*Das Zuhandene*) is not grasped theoretically at all […]." Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 69. Parentheses added. For the German, see Martin Heidegger, *Sein und Zeit*, 11th ed. (Tübingen: Max Niemeyer Verlag, 1967), 69. To clarify the difference between the two categories: we do not think about the tool itself, only about how we are using it for some other end. Anything we use to some other purpose is not an end in itself and has no *Vorhandenheit* as long as it is working, that is, being used for its intended purpose. Things have *Vorhandenheit* when we contemplate them as singular objects, unrelated to the context in which they might be used. Something that initially had *Zuhandenheit* might break and suddenly lose its handiness, thus becoming unhandy and forcing us to consider it in terms of its *Vorhandenheit*. "Unhandy things (*Dieses Unzuhandene*)," Heidegger explains, "are disturbing and make evident the *obstinacy* of what is initially to be taken care of before anything else." Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 73. *Sein und Zeit*, 74. Italics in original; parentheses added.

[88] Modernist poetry is particularly unhandy due to its difficulty. Take for instance Daniel Albright's description of *The Waste Land* as a "jagged" poem: "you bleed when you handle the jagged edges of *The Waste Land*"; "[t]he edges of [Eliot's] stories are jagged, not carefully filed down." *Putting Modernism Together: Literature, Music, and Painting 1872-1927* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2015), 5 and 242. The adjective "jagged" equally applies to modernist poetry in Iran and Iraq, which does not conform to previous poetic models because of its new formal features and innovative incorporations of myth and symbol.

contrived (especially when it comes to prose poetry), considering poetry as present-at-hand and thus as an object that requires contemplation is central to my project here and, more broadly, helps us understand what poetry is and does—though I would not necessarily exclude prose from working in the same manner.

Even if we might disagree with Sartre's distinction between poetry and prose and refuse the neat separation of the two into ready-at-hand and present-at-hand, the issue of literary commitment still persists, particularly in the colonial, decolonial, and postcolonial milieu of the Near East. In fact, the responses of Arab and Iranian critics to Sartre's conception of literary commitment are a significant instance of their transnational interconnection. According to Sartre, committed writers must choose "to reveal the world and particularly to reveal man to other men so that the latter may assume full responsibility before the object which has just been laid bare." Committed writers must make their readers aware of the injustices in the world in order to move them to action. "[T]he function of the writer," Sartre continues, "is to act in such a way that nobody can be ignorant of the world and that nobody may say he is innocent of what it's all about."[89] Sartre's call for social justice resonated with those who had experienced or were still experiencing the effects of European colonialism and the initial fallout of the Cold War, but many critics opposed the strictures of literary commitment, of using a work of literature for some purpose beyond itself.

Although Ṭāhā Ḥusayn stood firmly with the exponents of "art for art's sake,"[90] we can locate the introduction of Sartre's theory into the Arabic tradition with his coinage of the phrase

[89] Sartre, *"What is Literature?"* 38.

[90] The later proponents of which were largely associated with the Lebanese journal *al-Shiʿr*, established by Yūsuf al-Khāl (d. 1987) in 1957. Al-Khāl shared editing duties with Syro-Lebanese poet Adūnīs (*nom de plume* of ʿAlī

iltizām al-adīb (the writer's commitment) in the editor's comments ("*Mulāḥaẓāt*") of the June, 1947 issue of *The Egyptian Writer*.[91] In his article, Ḥusayn translates some sections of Sartre's piece and gives his own position on what Sartre has to say. [92] Ḥusayn takes issue with Sartre's stance on the possibility of writing committed poetry, mentioning that poetry—which was first produced orally and therefore preceded written prose in ancient societies—certainly played a role in the growth of human civilization. Ḥusayn argues that no matter how poetry relates to language, even if it does approach words as ends rather than means, it would be "absolutely foolish" (*askhaf al-sakhf*) to say that poets have not been committed to changing the world through their work.[93] Naturally, Ḥusayn was later proven correct as we can count some of the most prominent advocates of literary commitment in the Arab world among the poets.

Iltizām (commitment) quickly came to the fore in Arabic literary discourse after Ḥusayn's introduction of the term.[94] By 1953, when the Lebanese writer Suhayl Idrīs founded the Beiruti literary monthly *al-Ādāb*, commitment had become so central to Arabic literature that he issued a rallying call for it in his first editorial, "*Risālat al-Ādāb*" ("*al-Ādāb's Mission*"). "[T]he kind of literature which this Review calls for and encourages," he proclaims, "is the literature of

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Aḥmad Saʿīd Isbir, b. 1930). The journal was published until 1964 and again from 1967-1969.

[91] See Yoav Di-Capua's excellent analysis of Ḥusayn's comments, as well as a broader treatment of the reception of commitment in the Arab world, in "The Intellectual Revolt of the 1950s and the 'Fall of the *Udabāʾ*," *Commitment and Beyond: Reflections on/of the Political in Arabic Literature since the 1940s*, Friederike Pannewick, Georges Khalil, and Yvonne Albers eds., Literatures in Context: Arabic – Persian – Turkish, Vol. 41, Verena Klemm, Sonja Mejcher-Atassi, Friederike Pannewick, and Barbara Winckler eds. (Weisbaden: Reichert Verlag Wiesbaden, 2015).

[92] Ṭāhā Ḥusayn, "*Mulāḥaẓāt*," *al-Kātib al-Miṣrī* 6, no. 21 (Rajab 1366; June 1947), 9-21.

[93] Ḥusayn, "*Mulāḥaẓāt*," 14.

[94] For a thorough review of the development of committed literature in the eastern Arabic context, see Verena Klemm, "Different Notions of Commitment (*Iltizām*) and Committed Literature (*al-adab al-multazim*) in the Literary Circles of the Mashriq," *Arabic and Middle Eastern Literatures* 3, no. 1 (2000), 51-62.

commitment (*iltizām*) which issues forth from Arab society and pours back into it."[95] Many Arab writers, including but not limited to Louis Awad, Maḥmūd Amīn al-ʿĀlim (d. 2009), and ʿAbd al-ʿAẓīm Anīs (d. 2009)—the proponents of socialist realism in Egypt—as well as the Marxist Lebanese critics Raʾīf Khūrī (d. 1967) and Ḥusayn Muruwwah (d. 1987), took up their pens for the cause of commitment during the years of anti-colonial and budding nationalist movements, choosing, in Sartre's words, "to reveal the world and particularly to reveal man to other men so that the latter may assume full responsibility before the object which has thus been laid bare." Agreeing with Sartre's position on *engagement*, these writers championed the transformative power of socialist realism in literature. Commitment defined Arabic literature during the mid-twentieth century, so much so that M.M. Badawi writes, "From the middle of the 1950s onwards commitment, whether moderate or extreme, seems to have been the rule rather than the exception."[96]

The history of commitment in Iran parallels the Arab one, though Sartre's inaugural essay seems to not have played such a central role in early discussions of literary commitment. It did, however, become a topic of debate decades later. Alavi outlines in detail the courses of the commitment debate in Iran, from which I ought to mention a few salient points relevant for comparison with the Arab case.[97] First of all, like *iltizām*, the Persian word for commitment, *taʿahhud*, "seems to have entered the lexicon of Persian literary discourse as a calque on Jean

[95] *Al-Ādāb* 1, no. 1 (January, 1953). Translation found in Mohammad Mustafa Badawi, *Modern Arabic Literature and the West* (London: Ithaca Press, 1985),13.

[96] Badawi, *A critical introduction*, 209.

[97] For a detailed analysis of commitment in modern Persian literature in Iran, see Hamid Dabashi, "The Poetics of Politics: Commitment in Modern Persian Literature," *Iranian Studies* 18, no. 2 (Spring-Autumn, 1985): 147-188.

Paul Sartre's *engagement*."[98] Secondly, Iranian writers did not restrict the call for committed writing to prose because poetry had always had a political role in society, as in the Arab case. Finally, though *iltizām* and *taʿahhud* entered the Arab and Iranian literary spheres at roughly the same moment, *taʿahhud* would not reach the fevered pitch that *iltizām* did during the 1950s until much later on, hitting its peak in the late 1970s.[99]

This reflects the different political trajectories of Iran and the Arab nations. In Iran, the Shāh (Shah) Muḥammad Riżā Pahlavī (r. 1941-1979; d. 1980), became more and more despotic until the outbreak of the Islamic Revolution in 1979, and committed writers grew more concerned with the lack of progress on social justice issues in Iran as his rule wore on. In the Arab case, the 1967 loss to Israel in the Six Day War forced Arab writers to reevaluate the role of committed writing, which lost its former luster in the wake of the defeat. Initially, however, Iranian literary commitment advanced along the same lines as it did in the Arab world, the "mainstream"[100] view best outlined in the comprehensive though often polemical analysis of modern Iranian poetry found in Riżā Barāhinī's *Ṭalā dar mis: dar shiʿr va shāʿirī* (*Gold in Copper: On Poetry and Poesy*).[101] Barāhinī's stance on the necessity of committed writing is largely congruent with that of Sartre (other than Sartre's position on poetry) and Suhayl Idrīs. Additionally, Barāhinī's thought is quite useful in overcoming the contradictions Sartre finds in

[98] Alavi, "The Poetics of Commitment," vii.

[99] Alavi, "The Poetics of Commitment," viii.

[100] Alavi's term, by which he means the view that "corresponds most closely with commitment debates in Europe and the Americas." Alavi, "The Poetics of Commitment," xi.

[101] (Tihrān: Kitāb-i Zamān, 1347 [1968]). For an overview of Barāhinī's life and career, see Michael C. Hillman, "Rezā Barāheni: A Case Study of Politics and the Writer in Iran, 1953-1977," *Literature East & West* 20, nos. 1-4 (Jan.-Dec. 1976), 304-313.

poetry's relationship with words. He moves beyond Sartre's denigration of poetry's use of words as ends in and of themselves when he writes, "The only means from which the poet can choose in undertaking the task [of creating a better society and advancing humankind] are words. Words are at one and the same time the means and the ends of poetry."[102]

We find many threads strung between the Arab and Iranian commitment debates. Explicit political affiliations also tie together a number of the subjects of this study, particularly their progressive politics and Communist sympathies (if not outright membership in Communist organizations). Al-Sayyāb was a card-carrying member of the Party, as was Aḥmad Shāmlū before his affiliation with the Iranian Communists (the Tūdah) got him thrown in prison in the early 1950s. Both al-Sayyāb and Shāmlū would later distance themselves from Communism, al-Sayyāb moving in a nationalist direction and Shāmlū preferring to remain ideologically free but sympathetic to the Left. Al-Bayātī was affiliated with the Communist Party long after al-Sayyāb turned his back on it. Nīmā was never a member of the Tūdah, but his poetry was hailed as a Communist rallying call, associated with the Iranian left, and published in Communist journals.[103]

These continual demands that writers commit their work to a cause eventually led the Tunisian writer, intellectual, and statesman Maḥmūd al-Masʿadī to argue for the necessity of the writer's ideological freedom in 1957 at the third conference of Arab writers in Cairo. His assertion that "no attempt should be made to confine [the writer] within a certain ideology,

[102] Barāhinī, *Ṭalā dar mis*, 19.

[103] Peyman Vahabzadeh, "Rebellious action and 'guerrilla poetry': Dialectics of art and life in 1970s Iran," *Persian Language, Literature, and Culture: New leaves, fresh looks*, Kamran Talattof ed. (New York: Routledge, 2015), 107.

whether it is Marxist or any other equivalent ideology of the western or eastern variety" met with a "vehemently hostile" reaction from the audience,[104] thus bringing into sharp relief the fault lines of the commitment debates not just in Egypt but the broader Near East as well.[105] Yet participants on both sides of the debate over commitment and the writer's freedom acknowledged that art—whether explicitly committed or autonomous—carried with it political meaning.

For my purposes, I find it productive to consider the modernist poetry addressed below in light of Jacques Rancière's conception of "the aesthetic regime."[106] Answering the question of *how* literature becomes political—rather than attempting to locate the political motivations of the writer—Rancière explains that the "politics of literature is not the politics of its writers. *It does not deal with their personal commitment to the social and political issues and struggles of their times*."[107] Instead of focusing on the conscious commitment or non-commitment of the writer, Rancière is interested in how "literature 'does' politics as literature."[108] He explains how the intertwining of politics and literature occurs through a process of "dissensus," which is "the

[104] Badawi, *Modern Arabic Literature and the West*, 1, 2. Badawi also informs us that al-Masʿadī's speech was later published in Suhayl Idrīs's *al-Ādāb* 6, no. 1 (January, 1958).

[105] These debates are far from over, as evidenced by the recently-published conference proceedings on "Commitment and Dissent in Arabic Literature since the 1950s," collected in *Commitment and Beyond: Reflections on/of the Political in Arabic Literature since the 1940s*. Participants in the conference, including Arab writers such as Elias Khoury and Sinan Antoon, and contributors to the volume not only review the development of the commitment debates in the Arab world but also extend their analyses of the phenomenon through to the twenty-first century, thus highlighting its continued relevance today.

[106] He explains, "I call this regime *aesthetic* because the identification of art no longer occurs via a division within ways of doing and making, but it is based on distinguishing a sensible mode of being specific to artistic products. The word aesthetics does not refer to a theory of sensibility, taste, and pleasure for art amateurs. It strictly refers to the specific mode of being of whatever falls within the domain of art, to the mode of being of the objects of art." *The Politics of Aesthetics*, Gabriel Rockhill trans. (New York: Continuum, 2011), 22. Italics in original.

[107] Jacques Rancière, *The Politics of Literature*, *SubStance #103* 33, no. 1 (2004), 10. Italics mine.

[108] Rancière, *The Politics of Literature*, 10.

essence of politics […,] the demonstration (*manifestation*) of a gap in the sensible itself. Political demonstration makes visible that which had no reason to be seen; it places one world in another […]."[109] In the end, "[p]olitics, before all else, is an intervention in the visible and the sayable."[110] The aesthetic regime, which replaces modernity in Rancière's vocabulary, represents a change in how people relate to art, intervening on "the seeable, sayable, and possible."[111] This redefinition of modernity through the aesthetic regime, which intervenes on the sayable, the possible, and the thinkable itself, is the product of the historicization of literature and the human relationship to it.

I understand Arab and Persian modernist poetry as just such an intervention on the sayable, as Rancière puts it. To return to Awad's modernist manifesto once again as a point of comparison, its concluding paragraph, bathed in Communist red, reflects Awad's attempt to "place one world in another," to intervene on the visible and the sayable by changing the form of poetry and thus also the world. Awad's failed modernist project and the successful one that took off in Iraq had to deal with the highly influential force of European poetic modernism, a growing Third World consciousness, and the presence of Communist ideology in the Near East of the mid-twentieth century. Like much previous scholarship on modernist Arabic and Persian poetry, I too look to its political make up. However, whereas many studies have considered this poetry as a reflection of society and therefore as a way to understand the truth of an external political reality, I consider modernist poetry as inherently political in its demonstration of the "gaps in the

[109] Jacques Rancière, *Dissensus: On Politics and Aesthetics*, Steven Corcoran ed. and trans. (New York: Continuum, 2010), 38. Parentheses and italics in original.

[110] Rancière, *Dissensus*, 37.

[111] Joseph J. Tanke, "What is the Aesthetic Regime?" *Parrhesia* 12 (2011), 71.

sensible" through its negotiations of contemporary political and social phenomena and attempts to offer its own interventions on the seeable and sayable.

I am primarily interested in modernist poetry's internal aesthetics: its formal make up, its intertextual links with the past, and the new worlds it makes manifest. In striking a balance between text and context while always paying attention to the role that form plays in defining a poem's content, I am guided in part by Cleanth Brooks's rejection of a formulaic dualism in poetic criticism "that the poem constitutes a 'statement' of some sort, the statement being true or false, and expressed more or less clearly or eloquently or beautifully." Because of this dualism, "the critic is forced to judge the poem by its political or scientific or philosophical truth; or, he is forced to judge the poem by its form as conceived externally and detached from human experience."[112] Instead of seeking out some immutable (but, if we are honest with ourselves, wholly inaccessible) truth in a poem or attempting to locate its core "statement," I account for poetry's dialectic relationship with the context of its composition, its creators, and its readers in my analyses. While I am not bound to the New Criticism—I balance such an approach with biographical and historical analysis when appropriate—text-based readings help me to look beyond earlier scholarly limitations within national paradigms of understanding. Too often Near Eastern modernist poetry has been understood primarily as a type of writing back against the colonizer whether due to its perceived revolutionary posturing, nationalism, or apolitical autonomy that challenges by way of ignoring. While such readings are useful and necessary, they neither account for the more complicated transnational dynamics of poetic exchange out of which Arabic and Persian modernist poetries emerged nor ask how these poetries' transnational

[112] Cleanth Brooks, *The Well Wrought Urn: Studies in the Structure of Poetry* (New York: Harcourt Brace & Company, 1975 [1942]), 196

poetics (their lateral East-to-East transactions) might also challenge received notions of West-to-East (vertical) poetic and political influence—a much thornier problem indeed.

I am therefore interested in how and where Arabic and Persian modernist poetries fit (or do not fit) in broader conceptions of world literature. In this regard, my study also calls into question a number of assumptions about these poetries: that they are primarily representations of nationalist sentiment, that they are the direct results of European colonization and poetic influence, that they violently break away from local poetic traditions. I am thus also guided by Stanley Fish's work on interpretive communities, if only to question some of the "collective decisions as to what will count as literature"[113] that have defined scholarly approaches to modernist poetry in the Near East and to *persuade*[114] you to read it in a new way. To do so, I bring formal analysis grounded in the Arabic and Persian rhetorical traditions into broader conversations about transnationalism and literary development, thus combining the global and the local in my approach.

I bring the global and the local together by analyzing the modernist poems in question through a transnational paradigm of understanding. I use such an approach to highlight the profound connections between Iraqi and Iranian modernism, looking at how they are linked at the levels of texts (the poetry itself) and contexts (the nation states' parallel accretions of political power in Iran and Iraq). The transnational approach to literature, Paul Jay explains, "has

[113] Stanley Fish, *Is There a Text in This Class? The Authority of Interpretive Communities* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1980), 11.

[114] Persuasion features prominently in Fish's work. "The business of criticism," he tells us, "[is] not to decide between interpretations by subjecting them to the test of disinterested evidence but to establish by *political and persuasive* means (they are the same thing) the set of interpretive assumptions from the vantage of which the evidence (and the facts and the intentions and everything else) will hereafter be specifiable. […] I claimed the right, along with everyone else, to argue for *a way of reading*, which, if it became accepted, would be, for a time at least, the true one." *Is There a Text in This Class?*, 16. Italics added.

productively complicated the nationalist paradigm".[115] Moreover, by taking account of how "minor" literatures interact with each other, we can challenge the usual binary models of center-and-periphery that have defined previous analytical approaches to literature. Even when approaches using such models are critical of the center, as Lionnet and Shih clarify, "Critiquing the center, when it stands as an end in itself, seems only to enhance it; the center remains the focus and the main object of study."[116] Along the same lines, Jay "argue[s] that the center-periphery model for the study of globalization […] needs to be complicated."[117] Continuing in this vein, Barbara Fuchs adds that "[t]ransnationalism offers great opportunities to transcend monolingual and formal categories of analysis, taking us beyond the national literature and replacing the inert vectors of 'transmission' or 'imitation' through which literary studies have managed these connections in the metropole."[118] Though I do take account of the center-periphery relations with Europe that contributed to—I say contributed to, not caused!—the genesis of Arabic and Persian modernist poetry, this dissertation's focus on the lateral connections of Iraqi and Iranian modernism not only endorses the productive method of the transnational approach but also puts it into practice by studying literatures less-commonly taught in the American academy.[119] Furthermore, and emerging alongside the critique of nationalism

[115] *Global Matters*, 1.

[116] *Minor Transnationalism*, 3.

[117] *Global Matters*, 3.

[118] "Another Turn for the Transnational: Empire, Nation, Imperium in Early Modern Studies," *PMLA* 130, no. 2 (March 2015), 417.

[119] This dissertation thus represents the combination of theory and practice modernist studies needs to confront the field's usual Western framework. Friedman recognizes this problem when she writes, "As a field in general, modernist studies is insufficiently planetary to fulfill the promise of what Douglas Mao and Rebecca L. Walkowitz have termed 'the transnational turn' in the field. Whether adhering to a canonical modernism, a [Fredric] Jamesonian 'singular modernity,' the modernity of a Wallersteinian 'world-system,' or a Deleuzian 'minor' or 'alternative' modernity, the field has insufficiently challenged the prevailing 'Western' framework within which

found in Iraqi and Iranian modernist poetry I mentioned above, my transnational approach seeks to overcome the artificial but commonly found separation of Arabic and Persian literatures along national lines when they would be better understood as being in dialog, laterally speaking to each other and not just with or through the metropole.

Jahan Ramazani's concept of "poetic citizenship" provides solid ground for moving beyond the national boundaries so prevalent in literary studies. Ramazani positions "poetic citizenship," the ways with which poets cross static national boundaries in their work, against "norms of literary citizenship based on either political jurisdiction and place of birth (*dēmos*) or on their filiative counterpart (*ethnos*)".[120] In the case of the modernist movements in Iran and Iraq, poets share in this "poetic citizenship" with their parallel changes of premodern form and uses of similar themes and symbols notwithstanding the relative lack of any direct interaction between the key figures on either side. Ramazani further explains that "national labels" are often arbitrarily applied to writers "to serve disciplinary, ideological, and pedagogical functions," "blurring" the filiative and affiliative categories of *dēmos* and *ethnos* and strengthening the imagined community.[121] Through this norming process and the reduction of writers and their works to singular interpretations that serve a specific end, the dynamic natures of literature and its creators can be regulated and redirected in the interests of nations, whether their own or those of foreign readers.

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studies of modernity and modernism are conducted." *Planetary Modernisms*, 3. Mao and Walkowitz coined the phrase "the transnational turn" in "The New Modernist Studies," *PMLA* 123, no. 3 (2008): 737-748.

[120] Ramazani, *A Transnational Poetics*, 48.

[121] Ramazani, *A Transnational Poetics*, 24. The phrase "imagined community" here refers to Benedict Anderson's pioneering work *Imagined Communities* (New York: Verso, 2006 [1983]), in which he investigates how the idea of the nation develops out of shared social imaginaries.

Iraqi and Iranian modernists, by looking through their shared poetic past in order to create the new possibilities their modernist poetry opens up, challenge simple national categories. Even when their poetry could be read as nationalist, it still moves outside of and beyond static national borders through the poets' "poetic citizenship" in the borderless world of the modernist movement—borderless in so much as modernism is not limited to any one national context. Iraqi and Iranian modernists coupled instances of this outward focus with deep inward reflection. These two constituent elements in either movement emerged out of poets' incorporation of global Western poetic influence alongside an undeniable obsession with remaining locally authentic and grounded in the rich literary histories of Arabic and Persian. Because of these myriad connections between Iraqi and Iranian modernist poetries in their form, content, and embodiment of the decolonial and postcolonial experience of the mid-twentieth century, a transnational approach is not only useful and enlightening but also *necessary* in order to understand either movement, and Ramazani's conception of "poetic citizenship" is one practical concept for thinking in this direction.

But what organizing rationale can we posit in place of national models of belonging on which to found this transnational approach? It is not enough to simply notice the similar changes in Persian and Arabic modernism because we could easily just look to Europe, trace the contrails of *influence* moving from West to East, and be done with it. We could also chalk their resemblance up to parallel engagements with European modernism and style them merely a result of top-down globalization. Alternatively, we have "transnationalism from below" favored by Lionnet and Shih,[122] but the systematic aspects of such an approach to literary analysis remain

[122] As opposed to "transnationalism from above," which is concomitant with the processes of globalizing capital. 'Transnationalism from below,' on the other hand, "is the sum of the counterhegemonic operations of the nonelite who refuse assimilation to one given nation-state [...]." *Minor Transnationalism*, 5-6. They quote Sarah J. Mahler,

under-theorized. One solution that proves quite fruitful in my investigation is to understand literature(s) as part of a set of systems, a dynamic grouping Itamar Even-Zohar (b. 1939) calls a polysystem. It is worth quoting the foundational principles of Even-Zohar's polysystem theory at length:

> The idea that semiotic phenomena, i.e. sign-governed human patterns of communication (such as culture, language, literature, society), could more adequately be understood and studied if regarded as systems rather than conglomerates of disparate elements has become one of the leading ideas of our time in most sciences of man. Thus, the positivistic collection of data, taken bona fide on empiricist grounds and analyzed on the basis of their material *substance*, has been replaced by a functional approach based on the analysis of *relations*. Viewing them as systems made it possible to hypothesize how the various semiotic aggregates operate. The way was subsequently opened for the achievement of what has been regarded throughout the development of modern science as a supreme goal: the detection of the laws governing the diversity and complexity of phenomena rather than the registration and classification of these phenomena.[123]

My approach takes up the relations between Iraqi and Iranian literature to create a theory of transnational modernism. It is founded in delineating the hows and whys behind the interconnection of what have mainly been considered only as national literary productions defined by European empire-building and colonization. By considering Arabic and Persian modernist poetry transnationally, I move beyond previous studies based only on cataloging instances of European influence and local response. My approach develops out of polysystem

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"Theoretical and Empirical Contributions toward a Research Agenda for Transnationalism," *Transnationalism from Below*, Michael Peter Smith and Luis Eduardo Guarzino eds. (London: Transaction, 1998), 64-100. One factor central to my understanding of the transnational movement of literature also found in Lionnet and Shih's definition is the importance of the participation of nonelites rather than government agents or agencies. This use of the term transnational is also prevalent in political science. See, for example, Matthew Evangelista, "Transnational Organizations and the Cold War," *The Cambridge History of the Cold War*, Vol. 3, Melvyn P. Leffler and Odd Arne Westad eds. (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 400-421.

[123] Itamar Even-Zohar, "Polysystem Theory," in *Polysystem Studies*, [= *Poetics Today* 11, no. 1] (1990), 9. Italics in original.

theory, which can account for the multiple nodes of connection and disconnection among various literary systems. Even-Zohar points out how students of literature, when confronted with a reality in which two literary systems exist among one community, generally limit themselves to one out of convenience, though "how inadequate the results are cannot be overstated."[124]

Yet I do not mean to say that we ought to collapse the Iraqi and Iranian poets whose works form the basis of this study into a single literary community juxtaposed against Europe. Instead, I suggest that we consider the planetary movement of modernist poetry to be a systemic whole made up of smaller systems (European, Arab, Iranian, etc.) that continually transact with each other—while also, of course, accounting for the power dynamic of the colonial relationship. Even-Zohar explains that "with a polysystem one must not think in terms of *one* center and *one* periphery, since several such positions are hypothesized."[125] Thus, the polysystem allows us to create a model of literary study that challenges the notions of center and periphery engendered by colonial relationships and opens up the possibility of dynamic engagement between a group of unstable, changing systems that can, and often do, operate in concert beyond or even against colonial states in spite of the unequal power relations at work.

My transnational approach, focused on the dynamism of the polysystem, comes from modernist thought itself. No one has argued for understanding modernism (during any era in history) as a dynamic response to a static past more convincingly than Adūnīs, and the parallels between his thought and Even-Zohar's theory of the polysystem are striking. Adūnīs's monumental study of Arab culture, *al-Thābit wa-l-mutaḥawwil: baḥth fī al-ibdāʿ wa-l-ittibāʿ*

[124] Even-Zohar, "Polysystem Theory," 12.

[125] Even-Zohar, "Polysystem Theory," 14. Italics in original.

ʿinda al-ʿarab (*The Static and the Dynamic: a Study of Innovation and Imitation among the Arabs*)[126] explores the relationship between two distinct systems in Arabic literature, one static and linked to religious orthodoxy (the past) and the other dynamic and directed toward new possibilities (the future). Naturally, Adūnīs, whose own poetry is anarchic, revivifying, vital, and quintessentially modern (while still anchored in tradition), sides completely with the dynamic against the static, pitting the two against each other throughout the course of Arab history.[127] Though polemical, Adūnīs's conception of the relationship between the static and the dynamic within Arabic literary history parallels Even-Zohar's usage of the same categories in his theory of the polysystem, which also favors dynamic, diachronic approaches to how literary systems function and interact.

In engaging with the texts I read as dynamic parts of a literary polysystem, I consider how modernist poetry grounded in the shared mythic and symbolic themes of the Near East brings the Arabic and Persian literary traditions together at a time when political vicissitudes worked to define the boundaries of imagined communities in distinct nation states. Moreover, there are also implicit transnational links between the Iraqi and Iranian modernists, whom I approach as members of one of the "minor-to-minor networks that circumvent the major altogether".[128] I look to the understudied network of Iraqi and Iranian modernists within the

[126] First published in 1974 in three volumes, this work is now in its tenth printing and consists of four volumes, (Beirut: Dār al-Sāqī, 2011). Robyn Creswell calls it a "critical encyclopedia" in light of its wide range. "Tradition and Translation: Poetic Modernism in Beirut," PhD diss., New York University, 2012, 40.

[127] Which has gained him a wide range of criticism, not only from the Islamic religious establishment but also within academia. For a review of these critiques, see Nadia M. Wardeh, "From ʿAlī Aḥmad Saʿīd to Adonis: A Study of Adonis's Controversial Position on Arab Cultural Heritage (*turāth*)," *Asian Cultural History* 2, no. 2 (July, 2010), 189-212.

[128] *Minor Transnationalism*, 8.

framework of what Asef Bayat calls a "social nonmovement," in which members of a group "act in common, albeit often individually."[129] I posit that a transnational unconscious, brought on by similar experiences of Western colonial intervention in the Near East, developed concurrently with Iraqi and Iranian modernist poetry. Precisely because the poets I study responded with particular, individual poetic visions, I study the relationship of Iraqi and Iranian modernisms in terms of Bayat's definition of nonmovements, in which "collective action is a function of shared interests and identities within a single group [here, non-European modernist poets], especially when confronted with a common threat […]."[130] Although early Communist affiliations may have influenced the transnational outlook of many Iraqi and Iranian modernist poets, many other variables were also at work either weakening the importance of Communist influence on the movement or providing alternative reasons for these transnational links.

In fact, a number of contradictions emerge out of the interrelationship of Communism and art in Iran and Iraq, contradictions perhaps best explained in verse by the youngest of the poets I engage with, Furūgh Farrukhzād. She implicitly describes the deadening impact of Communist ideology on poetic creativity in the poem "*Dilam barā-yi bāghchah mīsūzad*" ("I Feel Sorry for the Garden"; 1965?). The garden in the poem metaphorically stands in for modern Iranian society, while the lyric "I's" family members represent various political trends in Iran during the 1950s and 1960s. Farrukhzād writes,

> My brother says the garden's a graveyard
> He laughs at the riot of weeds
> and counts the fish corpses
> […]
> My brother's addicted to philosophy

[129] *Life as Politics*: *How Ordinary People Change the Middle East*, 2nd ed. (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2013 [2010]), 22-23.

[130] Bayat, "*Life as Politics*," 23.

He thinks the garden will be cured
by its own destruction
He gets drunk,
pounding his fist on wall and door,
[…]
And his hopelessness
is so small that every night
it gets lost in the tavern throng.[131]

The speaker's brother thinks the garden's only hope is in its destruction, a veiled reference to the classical Marxist idea that capitalism will eventually lead to its own ruin. However, her brother becomes "addicted to philosophy" and lost in thought and drink rather than being moved to action as he toes the Communist line. In these few lines, Farrukhzād exposes the inconsistency in adhering to a blind faith in the eventual triumph of Communism while society withers under the ever-strengthening grip of capitalism and its agents. We can expand this critique to the debate over commitment. In both the Arab and Iranian contexts, committed literature often degenerated into propaganda—an addiction many artists and writers could not overcome.

Badr Shākir al-Sayyāb expressed his exasperation with the call to commitment many times toward the end of his life. In fact, al-Sayyāb's vocal frustration with the restraints commitment placed on literary creativity[132] led him to an insightful observation about T.S. Eliot that frames my analysis in this dissertation. At the 1961 Rome Conference on Modern Arabic Literature, al-Sayyāb argued that Eliot—whom Louis Awad had called a *raj ʿī* (reactionary) poet

[131] Furūgh Farrukhzād, *Īmān biyāvarīm bih āghāz-i faṣl-i sard*, 73-74. Translation adapted from the version found in *Another Birth: Selected Poems of Forugh Farrokhzad*, Hasan Javadi and Susan Sallée trans. (Emeryville, CA: Albany Press, 1981), 80-81.

[132] Al-Sayyāb's comrades complained about his reading Edith Sitwell (d. 1964) and even Shakespeare. Al-Sayyāb, *Kuntu shuyūʿiyyan*, aʿaddahā li-l-nashr Walīd Khālid Aḥmad Ḥasan (Kūlūnīyā [Cologne]: Manshūrāt al-Jamal, 2007), 105, 174, 218.

years before in an article al-Sayyāb almost certainly read[133]—was perhaps the harshest critic of capitalist society. "I would not be going too far," al-Sayyāb ventures, "if I were to say that modern European civilization has faced no deeper or more violent ridicule than that of T.S. Eliot in his poem *The Waste Land*, *not in everything Communist writers and poets have written* against capitalism's role in said civilization."[134] While I further explore al-Sayyāb's position on Eliot in Chapter Three, these brief comments bring to mind the trajectory the commitment debate took in both the West and the Near East after Sartre published his essay. Indeed, the German Marxist and cultural theorist Theodor Adorno's take on the matter closely parallels later discussions of commitment in the Arab world.

Adorno's short essay "On Commitment" (1962) offers a way out of the contradictions that emerge with Sartre's absolute distinction between committed and autonomous art, and the German thinker's argument matches that of al-Sayyāb. Addressing the apparently mutually exclusive categories of committed art and 'art for art's sake,' Adorno explains,

> There are two 'positions on objectivity' which are constantly at war with one another, even when intellectual life falsely presents them as at peace. A work of art that is committed strips the magic from a work of art that is content to be a fetish, an idle pastime for those who would like to sleep through the deluge that threatens them, *in an apoliticism that is in fact deeply political*.[135]

Contra Sartre, Adorno calls not for any type of explicit commitment on the part of the writer, but rather for the autonomy of art, writing that "any literature which therefore concludes that it can

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[133] Luwīs ʿAwaḍ, "*T.S. Iliyūt*," *al-Kātib al-Miṣrī: al-majmūʿah al-kāmilah*, Vol. 1, ʿAbd al-ʿAziz Sharaf ed. (al-Hayʾah al-Miṣriyyah al-ʿĀmmah li-l-Kitāb, 1998), 557-568. DeYoung, *Placing the Poet*, 68-69. Awad's article is in the May, 1946 issue.

[134] *Al-Adab al-ʿarabī al-muʿāṣir*, 248-249. Italics added. Also see Badr Shākir al-Sayyāb, *Kuntu shuyūʿiyyan*, 127.

[135] "Commitment," Theodor Adorno, Ernst Bloch, Walter Benjamin, Bertolt Brecht, and Georg Lukács, *Aesthetics and Politics*, Francis McDonagh trans., Ronald Taylor trans. ed. (London: NLB, 1977), 177. Italics added.

be a law unto itself, and exist only for itself, degenerates into ideology no less. Art, which even in its opposition to society remains a part of it, must close its eyes and ears against it: it cannot escape the shadow of irrationality."[136] The immediate takeaway here is how Adorno's essay on commitment offers a way out of the inconsistency in Sartre's argument. By arguing that all art is committed in some way, Adorno's thought aligns nicely with al-Sayyāb's position on Eliot. Even art that does not rise above the level of the fetish represents a political position in its wanton lack of meaning beyond itself, its being content to be art and nothing else. But now that Adorno has leveled the playing field, bringing all art works together under the umbrella of the political—whether progressive and explicit or regressive and implicit, or some mixture of these—we must ask new questions, namely: Does some art have *more* political meaning or function *better* politically than other art? The question is no longer one of commitment, but rather of how all art works politically and how well it does so.

Before I conclude this introductory chapter, I would like to provide some preliminary answers to these questions by addressing my overall project here to broader issues of world literature, namely the exchange between Franco Moretti and Efraín Kristal at the beginning of this century. In 2000, Moretti proposed a new way of reading literature, one drawing on world-systems theory and intended to address the inherent inequality between literary centers and their peripheries.[137] Further, he suggested two metaphors we might use to understand literary diffusion

[136] Adorno, "Commitment," 193-194.

[137] Franco Moretti, "Conjectures on World Literature," *New Left Review* 1 (Jan.-Feb. 2000), 55-56. Moretti also, I should note, makes substantial mention of Itamar Even-Zohar's work, though he does not directly bring up polysystem theory. Moretti's article continues a line of thought Fredric Jameson opened up with his famous "Third-World Literature in the Era of Multinational Capitalism," *Social Text*, no. 15 (Autumn, 1986): 65-88. In it, Jameson argues that cultures of the Third World cannot "be conceived as anthropologically independent or autonomous, rather they are all in various distinct ways locked in a life-and-death struggle with first-world cultural imperialism—a cultural struggle that is itself a reflexion of the economic situation of such areas in their penetration by various stages of capital, or as it is sometimes euphemistically termed, of modernization." 68. The social scientist Immanuel

and development, the tree ("the phylogenetic tree derived from Darwin"; the "tool of comparative philology") and the wave, "also used in historical linguistics […], but it played a role in many other fields as well: the study of technological diffusion, for instance […]." "The tree," he explains, "describes the passage from unity to diversity: one tree, with many branches: from Indo-European, to dozens of different languages. The wave is the opposite: it observes uniformity engulfing an initial diversity […]."[138] Two years later, Kristal took up Moretti's metaphorical evocations of the tree and the wave and went with them to Latin America to test his conjectures about the unequal relationship of the core (Spain, in this instance) and the periphery.[139]

By testing Moretti's ideas (which he originally applied to the novel form) against the case of Spanish American literature, "where poetry does matter,"[140] Kristal provocatively challenges the homogenizing "wave," which Moretti tells us "runs into the branches of local traditions."[141] Kristal not only makes a compelling case for reading poetry at a time when the novel form dominated intellectual discussions of literature but also pushes back against Moretti's model. Kristal's readings of the Nicaraguan poet Rubén Darío (d. 1916), who "single-handedly expanded the possibilities of Spanish prosody by writing in a myriad unprecedented poetic forms" and "undermined the widespread assumption, in both Spain and Spanish America, that

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Wallerstein initially developed the analytical model for world-systems theory in the 1970s.

[138] Moretti, "Conjectures on World Literature," 67.

[139] Efraín Kristal, "Considering Coldly… A Response to Franco Moretti," *New Left Review* 15 (May-June 2002): 61-74.

[140] Kristal, "Considering Coldly…," 62.

[141] Moretti, "Conjectures on World Literature," 67.

the study of Spanish prosody was the study of appropriate norms,"[142] show that Moretti's local trees and their branching traditions can and do send back ripple effects when struck with waves. Kristal thus challenges "[Moretti's] postulate of a general homology between the inequalities of the world economic and literary systems. For the forms that Moretti acknowledges as new in [the] fiction [he addresses] were developed in the periphery, not as a compromise with forms from the center, but as a *self-conscious literary project* that addressed local imperatives […]."[143] To return now to the questions at hand, Darío's poetry had a meaningful and lasting poetic impact not only on Latin American Spanish poetry (he influenced Pablo Neruda, Jorge Luis Borges, Octavio Paz, and others) but on the poetry of Spain itself—where "poets such as Juan Ramón Jiménez, Pedro Salinas, Jorge Guillén or Federico García Lorca acknowledged their debt to developments in Spanish America."[144] Moreover, Darío's poetry presented an "unprecedented kind of individualism"—something we will find with the Iraqi and Iranian modernists as well.

I bring up Darío as a comparative case not because his experiences and poetic innovations directly map onto those of the Iraqi and Iranian poets I study but rather because Kristal's focus on Spanish poetry composed in the margins offers a compelling parallel to my own project, which considers the continued importance of poetry in modern Iraqi and Iranian cultures. In all three cases, poetry persisted in its important political role in society. As Uraguayan socialist critic Angel Rama argues, Darío's poetry took on political meaning due to where it came from. Rama "insisted that Darío's role in the liberation of Spanish American

[142] Kristal, "Considering Coldly," 65.

[143] Kristal, "Considering Coldly," 69-70. Italics added.

[144] Kristal, "Considering Coldly," 65, 66.

poetry from European norms was a development of the highest literary, social and *political* significance."[145] Kristal's recognition that the poet in the periphery can also "create forms […] that have decisively transformed the course of literary history at large"[146] lies also at the center of my analysis here. Rather than retracing obvious lines of influence from European to Arabic or Persian poetry of the modern period, I am interested in discovering how Arabic and Persian poetries develop their own forms, create their own political significance, and contribute to the still limited and limiting category we call world literature. I therefore call for us to redirect our attention to the modernisms of the periphery and how they interacted with each other beyond the bounds of the colonizer's metropole. Iranian and Iraqi modernist poetries, with their common reserve of myth and history and their shared formal basis in Arabic prosody, offer an eminently productive site of analysis for such a study as they grew not only out of European influence and local developments but also in dialogue with each other.

In conclusion, I employ a critical approach in my analysis of the transnational poetics of Iraqi and Iranian modernist poetry. I work at two levels, first comparing the nearly simultaneous changes in form and content that occurred in both traditions. Second, I show how by taking a transnational approach we can read the two together to challenge models of understanding based around Eurocentric models of influence. In making this argument, I draw on a range of theory from the poets themselves, other Arab and Iranian critics, and Western thinkers. Of particular importance are theories of transnationalism (which in my study begin with Awad and continue to the works of Lionnet and Shih, Ramazani, Friedman, and Jay), the polysystem and dynamism (Even-Zohar and Adūnīs), unorganized collective movements (Bayat), and commitment (Sartre,

[145] Kristal, "Considering Coldly," 67. Italics added.

[146] Kristal, "Considering Coldly," 74.

Ḥusayn, Barāhinī, al-Sayyāb, Idrīs, al-Masʿadī, Adorno, and more). I use this toolbox of different theories to explain the transnational poetics that create and are created by the texts with which I work.

The poems I analyze are products of a transnational imagination and therefore require a transnational approach in light of their shared formal and thematic content as well as the similar contexts within which they were composed: the poets' experiences of European colonialism and imperialism in Iran and Iraq. The modernist movements in Iraq and Iran were specifically transnational because the literary exchanges that drove them did not occur between international elites but rather among a motley collection of poets and thinkers who, for the most part, had little political power and were not government actors. They were part of a literary avant-garde that was largely excluded from national political machinery, and their innovations on poetic forms and themes moved transnationally across national borders.

I argue not only that considering modernist poetic production from Iran and Iraq to be the result of European influence offers an incomplete understanding of how this poetry works but that reading these two modernist traditions in isolation from each other is also inadequate. In order to better understand both Iranian and Iraqi modernist poetries, we must consider the transnational movements that led to their growth. Finally, by showing how Iraqi and Iranian modernist poets were speaking laterally to each other, this project challenges arbitrary divisions of literatures along national and linguistic boundaries and maps the frontiers of a new direction in the field of Near Eastern literatures.

This chapter provides the theoretical foundation for my readings of Iraqi and Iranian modernist poetry, which I develop over the following four chapters. I begin these readings by investigating the poetry of Nīmā Yūshīj, the founder of Persian modernist poetry, and his

continued reliance on the premodern Arabic prosodic system. My analysis of Nīmā's adaptations of this system, which came roughly a decade before the beginning of the free verse movement in Iraq, highlights the formal links between Arabic and Persian modernist poetry. I also pay close attention to Nīmā's intertextual forays into premodern myth and the Near Eastern mystical tradition as a crucial case for comparison with the techniques of the Iraqi modernists. In the third chapter, therefore, I move on to discuss Badr Shākir al-Sayyāb's poetic project. I look to his formal innovations and intertextual engagements of Near Eastern myth and European literature as well as how his modernist project changed along with his political positions. In particular, I analyze how his experience of the 1953 coup against Mohammad Mosaddegh (Muḥammad Muṣaddiq, d. 1967) led him to leave the Iraqi Communist Party and the effect this had on how he hoped his poetry would eventually be remembered. Following my treatment of the intertwining of poetry and politics in Iraq with al-Sayyāb's poetry, in the fourth chapter I demonstrate how Aḥmad Shāmlū's and Furūgh Farrukhzād's modernist poetry continues Nīmā's project in Iran. My analysis discerns the contrasting roles of what I call the poetics of death in their poetic projects and elucidates the distinctions in their respective engagements with contemporary Iranian politics and society. I extend this theoretical mode of analysis into the final chapter, which examines ʿAbd al-Wahhāb al-Bayātī's poetics of revolution in Iraq. I address al-Bayātī's combination of existentialism, Sufism, and political commitment in his poems through his use of poetic masks such as ʿUmar al-Khayyām and the martyred Sufi Manṣūr al-Ḥallāj and how his philosophical foundations and poetic techniques work in transnational dialog with the Persian modernist poetic tradition. By taking the Arabic modernist tradition as its focal point and putting Arabic poetry in conversation with modernist poetry in Persian, this study sheds light on how modernism functions as a planetary movement and calls for a reconsideration of current models

for transnational literary analysis, reorienting modernist studies away from vertical approaches to lateral ones that consider minor modernist traditions on their own terms.

Chapter Two

Foundations: Nīmā Yūshīj's New Poetry and Transnational Modernism

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ای شاعر جوان !
این ساختمان که «افسانه»ی من در آن جاگرفته ست و یک طرز مکالمه ی طبیعی و آزاد را نشان می دهد، شاید برای دفعه اول پسندیده ی تو نباشد و شاید تو آن را به اندازه ی من نپسندی.

O Young Poet!
This structure into which my *Afsānah* (*Myth*) has been placed, and which demonstrates a natural and free type of conversation, might not appeal to you at first, and you might not like it as much as I do.

- Nīmā Yūshīj, Introduction to *Afsānah*[147]

In the introductory notes he wrote to his 1922 long poem *Afsānah* (*Myth*), Iranian poet Nīmā Yūshīj begins by calling out to an unnamed "Young Poet" (*ay shāʿir-i javān*).[148] Addressed to the new generation of poets, these three words along with the comments and poem to follow were as foundational for modernist Persian poetry as Ezra Pound's command to "Make it new!" and his shepherding of the nascent European modernist movement were in the West.[149] Discussing the new and strange yet somehow familiar form of the poem that follows, Nīmā tells his young charge, "This structure (*sākhtimān*) into which my *Afsānah* has been placed, and which demonstrates a natural (*ṭabīʿī*) and free (*āzād*) type of conversation, might not appeal to you at first, and you might not like it as much as I do." Nīmā's word choice here points to the central role he attributes to form as well as the generational divide he saw taking shape in the Persian poetic tradition. First, he speaks to a young (*javān*) poet, opposing this poet (and also

[147] Nīmā Yūshīj, *Majmūʿah*, 37. Cf. the translation in Firoozeh Papan-Matin, "Love: Nima's Dialogue with Hafez," *Essays on Nima Yushij*, 174.

[148] Perhaps a friend of his, though he mentions no name. See Papan-Matin, "Love: Nima's Dialogue with Hafez," 173.

[149] On Pound's use of the phrase, see Michael North, "The Making of 'Make It New," *Guernica*, 15 August 2013, https://www.guernicamag.com/the-making-of-making-it-new/.

himself) with the classical poets, whom he later refers to as the "*qudamā*,"[150] literally "the ancients." (The Arabic root of the word, *qāf* - *dāl* - *mīm*, has to do with being old or coming before.) Second, Nīmā relates the qualities of "natural" (*ṭabīʿī*) and "free" (*āzād*), applying them to describe what he has endeavored to do with his poetic language in *Afsānah*. Implicit in the comment is that older poetry is neither natural nor free, and that his contemporaries who were attempting to revive the old styles remained bound by them. Finally, in choosing to use the word *sākhtimān*, Nīmā lays the foundation for the modernist poetry to come.

Sākhtimān means many things, among them building, construction, frame, and structure. In describing the style of *Afsānah* through its structure, Nīmā grounds the modernist poetic developments he hoped to introduce to Persian poetry. His choice of *sākhtimān* along with his later use of semantically similar terms such as *bunyād* (foundation) and *banāʾ* (building) as well as the etymologically related verb *sākhtan* (the gerund form; "to build") show how Nīmā conceives of the structure of poetic modernity. Nīmā approaches the "building" of the poem using the terminology of an artisan. Thus, we can understand and elaborate Nīmā's poetic process by looking to the words he employs as tools in building what he refers to as the "imaginary edifice" that is the poem.[151]

By foregrounding the imaginary foundations of his version of modernity, Nīmā distinguishes it from the top-down modernization of Iran overseen by the Pahlavi regime (r. 1925-1979). Whereas Pahlavi modernity sought to cover over its illusory, constructed nature, Nīmā's modernity revels in the imaginary structures that make it possible: metaphor, simile, and poetic language more generally. Nimaic modernity and Pahlavi modernity both represent returns

[150] *Sic*, without the terminal Arabic *hamzah* in the text, commonly attested in Persian both modern and premodern.

[151] This metaphor appears in the poem "*Quqnūs*" ("The Phoenix"), which I analyze in depth below.

to and recapitulations of the Iranian past, but Pahlavi modernity followed a path laid out by the Iranian elite toward a set end, a telos that mirrored Western ideologies of secular modernity. Nīmā's modernist vision is decidedly different: rural, natural, and connected to everyday experience, Nīmā's modernity challenges Pahlavi modernity in its openness, its failure to conform to a singular notion of what modernity is. Notwithstanding the undeniable influence of Western thought and poetry on Nīmā's literary criticism and poetic style, the innovations he made in Persian poetry do not attempt to cover over the Persian poetic tradition or the realities of the Iranian past. Instead, the formal and thematic connections of Nīmā's poetry to the premodern Persian poetic tradition point to his careful, prolonged engagement with the past to revivify it and make it a part of an Iranian future yet to come.

Although Nīmā's modernism was partially the product of his engagement with the West, it also drew on earlier Persian and Arabic poetry in its innovative presentation of Near Eastern mythic themes and use of Arabic prosodic roots. Therefore, in this chapter, I pay close attention to the transnational movements of Arabic prosodic form in Iranian modernist poetry. The transnational presence of Arabic prosody in Persian is foundational to my analysis. I argue that Nīmā's recognition of the Arabic *ʿaruḍ*'s fundamental place in the history of Persian prosody (*ʿarūż*) until the modern period is his most noteworthy contribution to the contemporary Persian poetic tradition, though his symbolic innovations are also of primary importance. Nīmā's novel use of symbolism—often said to have been the most revolutionary change he brought to Persian modernism—is closely connected to his formal innovations and neither can be fully understood without the other, as we will see below.

I begin the chapter with a brief discussion of a short section from Nīmā's *Afsānah*, comparing his conception of modernism with that of the Pahlavi regime. After outlining the

makeup of Nīmā's modernist manifesto and my own theoretical approach to modernity, I trace how his poetry changed in light of his ideas about Persian poetic modernism. Starting from the poem "*Qū*" ("The Swan") composed in 1926, I also offer full translations and extended analyses of 1938's "*Quqnūs*" ("The Phoenix"), "*Ghurāb*" (The Raven"), and "*Murgh-i gham*" ("The Bird of Grief"). In "*Quqnūs*," I find previously unstudied intertextual links between the poem and the Persian mystical tradition, looking to Nīmā's sustained engagement with Farīd al-Dīn ʿAṭṭār's *Manṭiq al-ṭayr (The Conference of the Birds*) as well as his account of the Sufi Manṣūr al-Ḥallāj's martyrdom in the *Tazkirat al-awliyāʾ* (*Biographies of the Saints*). I pay particular attention to Nīmā's use of form in these three poems to show how his modernist poetry remained indebted to earlier Persian prosodic forms and thus did not completely break away from them. Overall, I contrast Nīmā's modernist poetry—an engagement with the past on its own terms—with contemporary the Pahlavi nation state's version of modernity, which amounted to an attempt to discount the continued relevance of past realities by denying them in the hopes of creating a wholly fictional past on which to build the present.

Modernist Beginnings in Afsānah

We can locate the beginnings of Nīmā's modernist poetics in 1922's *Afsānah*, a precursor to what would eventually develop into *shiʿr-i naw* (New Poetry). *Afsānah* consists of a conversation between two figures, *Afsānah* ("Myth" or "Legend"; the equivalent word in Arabic is *usṭūrah*)[152] and *ʿĀshiq* ("Lover"). The poem challenges the neo-classicism of the *bāzgasht* poets, members of the "literary return" poetic movement led by *Malik al-shuʿarāʾ* (King of

[152] Readers familiar with the Arabic modernist tradition might be reminded of Badr Shākir al-Sayyāb's collection *Asāṭīr*, 1st ed. (al-Najaf: Maṭbaʿat al-Ghārī al-Ḥadīthah, 1950).

Poets; poet laureate) Muḥammad Taqī Bahār (1886-1951),[153] who championed the earliest period of New Persian verse.[154] While Nīmā's reaction to the *bāzgasht* in *Afsānah* could be understood within the critical framework of Bloom's anxiety of influence,[155] the *bāzgasht* poets themselves were also engaging in a similar project, endeavoring to re-access what they considered the grand poetic past of the earliest New Persian poetry. Unlike the *bāzgasht* poets' poems, *Afsānah* is self-conscious of its relationship to the past in such a way that it at once acknowledges its debts to its precursors while at the same time strikes out on a new path, breaking with (some) premodern formal conventions.

Still, complaints about the confines of form were nothing new in Persian poetry. As a point of comparison, consider the premodern Persian mystical poet Jalāl al-Dīn Muḥammad Rūmī (d. 1273) who protests against the demands prosody makes on poetry while perfectly conforming to them to such an extent that he embeds their exact formal representation in his own poetic line: "*rastam az īn bayt u ghazal ay shah u sulṭān-i azal // mufta'ilun mufta'ilun mufta'ilun kusht ma-rā*" ("I was saved from this line of verse and love poetry, O king, O sultan of eternity! // All of this *mufta'ilun mufta'ilun mufta'ilun* was killing me!").[156] The second of the two hemistichs undermines the sentiment expressed in the first: I have escaped from the static,

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[153] Bahār coins the term *bāzgasht* in Volume 1 of his *Sabkshināsī yā tarīkh-i taṭavvur-i naṯr-i Fārsī: barā-yi tadrīs dar dānishkadah va dawrah-'i dukturī-'i adabiyyāt*, 4th ed., 3 vols. (Tihrān: Kitāb'hā-yi Parastū, 2535 [1976]). Introduction, page *yā'*. (Originally published from 1331- [1942-].) The *bāzgasht* was a reaction to the immediately preceding poetry in the *sabk-i hindī* (Indian style), which Bahār, among others, "generally deplored" for its overwrought style and "poverty of meaning." W.L. Hanaway, Jr., "*Bāzgašt-e Adabī*," *Encyclopedia Iranica* [*EIr*], IV/1, 58-60. http://www.iranicaonline.org/articles/bazgast-e-adabi.

[154] I.e., the earliest poetry found in Persian following the Arab invasion of Iran during the Islamic conquests.

[155] Harold Bloom, *The anxiety of influence; a theory of poetry* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1973).

[156] Jalāl al-Dīn Rūmī, *Kulliyāt-i shams*, *yā dīvān-i kabīr*, bā taṣḥīḥāt va havāshī-'i Badī' al-Zamān Furuzānfar, 2nd ed., Vol. 1 (Tihrān: Amīr Kabīr, 2535 [1976]), 31.

limiting boundaries set by poetic form. The second hemistich therefore shows the entire line to be wholly ironic, demonstrating not only that the poet remains stuck in the regularity of the meter but also that his complaint is tongue-in-cheek. The meter, though restrictive, does not actually kill the poet, and the second hemistich goes so far as to literally include the constituent feet of the meter the poet is using in the line (an octameter *rajaz*:[157] *mufta ʿilun mufta ʿilun mufta ʿilun mufta ʿilun* [2x]). Despite his protests, the poet continues to depend on the metrical form and uses it to his advantage.

In *Afsānah*, Nīmā, like Rūmī before him, conforms to many rules of premodern prosody but simultaneously interrogates the neo-classicism of his contemporaries. *Afsānah*'s formal structure is closely related to the *musammaṭ*,[158] a traditional poetic form, and thus we must note that Nīmā's complaint is not wholly with the continued influence of premodern forms but rather

[157] So named because the meter's rhythm matches the *rajaz* "in the she-camel, which consists in her quivering and then being quiet". s.v. "*rajaz*," in E.W. Lane, *Arabic-English Lexicon*. Also see W. Wright, *A Grammar of the Arabic Language*, Vol. 2, 362.

[158] A stanzaic poem, literally "the stringing of pearls on a necklace." See both G. van den Berg, "Stanzaic Poetry," *EIr*, http://www.iranicaonline.org/articles/stanzaic-poetry and G. Schoeler, "*Musammaṭ*," *EI2*. http://dx.doi.org/10.1163/1573-3912_islam_COM_0807. *Afsānah* has regular rhymes at the end of every other line (lines 2 and 4 of every 5-line stanza, and sometimes more than that) and the meter, consistent throughout, is based on the meter represented by the following repeated poetic feet: *fā ʿilun fā ʿilun fā ʿilun fa ʿ* (or *fā ʿ*) from the *mutadārik* (continuous) meter (¯ ˘ ¯ | ¯ ˘ ¯ | ¯ ˘ ¯ | ¯). There has been some debate over the poem's meter, cf. *Sīrūs Nīrū dar guftagū bā Ṣabā: shiʿr-hā-yi Nīmā va Akhavān bih durustī muntashir na-shudah-ast*, 29 June 1993. http://sabanewspaper.com/news_textview.php?showdetail=&id=1583 and *Bīraq-hā-yi mawj-i inqilāb-i shiʿr-i fārsī: bar-giraftah az kitāb* Afsānah-'i Nīmā *nivashtah-yi Sayyid ʿAṭāʾ allāh Muhājirānī*, 23 Day 1392 [13 January 2014]. de-rang.com/1392/10/شعر-انقلاب-موج-های‌بیرق. Finn Thiesen mentions *Afsānah*'s meter in particular in his book on prosody, probably because of the dearth of premodern poems found in this meter (although it is perfectly acceptable in the *ʿarūż* system). *A Manual of Classical Persian Prosody: with chapters on Urdu, Karakhanidic and Ottoman prosody* (Wiesbaden: Otto Harrassowitz, 1982), 243. "It is true that the meter of *Afsâneh* was not new;" Houshang Philsooph adds, "but it had been used in only a few short, minor poems, and never to its full potential. Whether because it was not hackneyed or because of its intrinsic features and its special suitability for romantic lyricism, this metre as used by Nima was like a refreshing breeze and appealed to the modern sensibilities of new generations. Thus, although it was not entirely novel, it did express the spirit of modern lyricism at the time probably better than any other metre." "Book Review: *Essays on Nima Yushij: Animating Modernism in Persian Poetry*," *Middle Eastern Literatures* 12, no. 1 (April, 2009), 103. See also Philsooph's comments about how Nīmā changes the *musammaṭ*'s traditional rhyme scheme in *Afsānah* on 104. For more on the *mutadārik* meter, see Wright, *A Grammar of the Arabic Language*, Vol. 2, 365.

with what he considers to be the *bāzgasht* poets' inability to express anything new within them.[159] In his 1946 address to the First Iranian Writer's Congress,[160] Nīmā described his own dabbling in the Khurāsāni style (the earlier style adopted by the *bāzghasht* poets) as "completely disconnected from real nature" ("*bi-ṭawr-i kullī dūr az ṭabīʿat-i vāqiʿ*") and unable to access the reality of the poet's life.[161]

Expressing this idea poetically in what is perhaps the most-quoted stanza of *Afsānah*, the character *ʿĀshiq* (The Lover) shouts,

Ḥāfiẓā! Īn chih kayd u durūgh-īst
ka-z zabān-i may u jām u sāqī-st
nālī ar tā abad bāvaram nīst
kih bar ān ʿishq-bāzī kih bāqī-st
man bar ān ʿāshiqam kih ravandah-st

O Ḥāfiẓ, what sort of lie and trick is this
that comes in the language of wine, goblet, and cup-bearer?
Despite your moaning on into eternity, I do not believe
in falling in love with things that remain

[159] Nīmā's criticisms of the *bāzgasht* became shriller over time. He would later write that his contemporaries composed poetry "like a resurrected corpse" (*murdah bar āmadah*) due to their continued total reliance on traditional forms and unwillingness to join in his metrical experiments. Nīmā Yūshīj, *Ḥarf-hā-yi hamsāyah*, 5th Ed. ([Tihrān:] Intishārāt-i Dunyā, 1363 [1984; originally written between 1939 and 1955]), 23; Nima Yushij, *The Neighbor Says: Nima Yushij and the Philosophy of Modern Persian Poetry*, with an Introduction and Addendum by M.R. Ghanoonparvar trans. (Bethesda, MD: Ibex Publishers, 2009), 38.

[160] Nīmā's participation in this Congress—sponsored by the Soviets—did not go unnoticed by critics seeking to place specifically political readings over his work. "The advent of World War II, bringing with it the end of the Reza Shah period," Abbas Milani writes of the immediately preceding years, "changed the intellectual atmosphere in Iran. The Tudeh Party, which had succeeded in attracting some of Nima's friends and published one of his poems in its magazine, made a concentrated effort to claim Nima as a 'fellow-traveler.' The fact that in 1946 he took part in what was billed as the First Congress of Iranian Writers, which took place at the Soviet Cultural Center, added currency to their claim. At the same time, when there was a split in the party, both sides—the Stalinists and the Social Democrats—claimed him as their own, even forging his signature on documents. But ultimately he belonged to neither. In letters and poems too numerous to ignore, he made sure the world understood that he was first and foremost a poet and unwilling to make his work subservient to any cause other than art and aesthetics." *Eminent Persians: The Men and Women Who Made Modern Iran: 1941-1979*, Vol. 2 (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 2008), 904.

[161] *Nakhustīn kungirah-'i nivīsandigān-i Īrān* (Tihrān: 1326 [1947]), 63. See also Karimi-Hakkak's translation, "Nima Yushij: A Life," *Essays on Nima Yushij*, 29.

I am in love with things that are ephemeral![162]

The Lover's outburst here succinctly sums up the earliest stage of Nīmā's modernist experiment. These lines follow the rules of premodern form in their meter and rhyme, but in them the Lover demands a new poetic content having to do with that which is ephemeral, passing, going by (*ravandah*)[163] instead of the eternal, the permanent, the remaining (*bāqī*).[164] Nīmā's innovations would eventually expand to change the static premodern forms Rūmī ironically complained about, but he remained attentive to their structural importance throughout his career.

The Structure of Persian Poetic Modernism

The Pahlavi dynasty, on the other hand, sought to establish its own static version of the Iranian past on which it intended to base a teleological, secular, and Western modernity. In the same year Nīmā wrote *Afsānah*, the *Anjuman-i aṯār-i millī* (Society for the National Heritage of Iran, or SNH) was established, marking a transitional moment between the end of the Qajar dynasty (r. 1789-1925) and the beginning of the Pahlavi era.[165] We can trace the Pahlavi dynasty's efforts to modernize Iran through the cultural and architectural projects initiated under the auspices of the SNH. In fact, "[t]he Pahlavi attempt to invent and diffuse the notion of

[162] Nīmā Yūshīj, *Majmuʿah*, 55. I have consulted translations found in Papan-Matin, "Love: Nima's Dialogue with Hafez," 177-178 and Nima Yushij, *The Bird of Sadness (Selected Poems)*, Munibar Rahman trans. (Aligarh, India: Aligarh Muslim University, Institute of Persian Research, 2010), 40. Also cf. Philsooph's comments on Papan-Matin and Arthur Lane's translation, "Book Review," 102-103.

[163] The word also brings to mind the adjective *ravān*, used to describe the "flow" of good poetry, which in the Persian tradition is often likened to a babbling brook.

[164] Philsooph's suggested translations. "Book Review," 102-103.

[165] The first Pahlavi monarch, Riżā Shāh Pahlavī (r. 1925-1941), initially rose to power in a British-backed coup in 1921, and it was in this transitional milieu that the SNH came to be.

cultural heritage was one of the most powerful forces behind Iran's modern political will."[166] Nīmā's poetry, however, does not fit into the SNH's model of cultural heritage, which focused on "radical secular reforms, territorial integrity, and national unity."[167] The SNH repackaged Iran's cultural heritage for modern consumption, for example, by building "secular pilgrimage" sites dedicated to towering figures within Iran's cultural patrimony.[168]

Nīmā's modernity, on the other hand, is much more open to the voices of the past, much less ready to mold them for political purposes. Instead of reforming the Persian poetic past into a new ideal or working to displace, disfigure, and reconstitute that same past in favor of something entirely new, Nīmā's poetry negotiates a delicate balance between past, present, and future. Furthermore, Nīmā's rural background and his dependence on themes and scenes disconnected from modern urban experience allowed him to develop his own vision of modernity,[169] one divorced from the official narrative of modernity put forward by the Pahlavi regime.[170] The

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[166] Talinn Grigor, *Building Iran: Modernism, Architecture, and National Heritage under the Pahlavi Monarchs* (New York: Periscope Publishing, Ltd., 2009), 9.

[167] Grigor, *Building Iran*, 9.

[168] Grigor's *Building Iran* includes a map on page 35 where she shows how the SNH's construction of "secular/civil pilgrimage" sites was meant to displace Twelver Shīʿī pilgrimage, which was to be "discouraged." "As an integral part of Iran's modernization project, the state and the SNH," she writes, "intended to first utilize and then to shift the network and rituals of the Shia pilgrimage to a different set of national destinations." These new, secular mausoleums included elaborate structures created for the author of the Persian national epic, Firdawsī (d. 1020), in northeastern Ṭūs; the philosopher Ibn Sīnā (d. 1037) in Hamadān; and the famous Shīrāzī poets Ḥāfiẓ (d. 1390) and Saʿdī (d. 1291/92) in their hometown; among others. However, Grigor is careful to point out that at these sites "the practice of *civil pilgrimage* that the Pahlavi kings intended was realized only *after* the [Islamic] revolution that brought their downfall." 215. Italics and brackets mine.

[169] An outsider to the typically urban milieu of Persian poetry, he hailed from Māzandarān, a mountainous region south of the Caspian Sea, and took an old adjectival form of the name of his birthplace, Yūsh, as a pen-name. On his choice of name, cf. Munibur Rahman, "Nīmā Yūshīdj," *EI2*, http://dx.doi.org/10.1163/1573-3912_islam_SIM_5913 and Ahmad Karimi-Hakkak, "Nima Yushij: A Life," *Essays on Nima Yushij*, 24-28. Nīmā's birth name was ʿAlī Isfandiyārī.

[170] Abbas Milani writes that the changing political tide ushered in by the end of the Qajar period profoundly affected Nīmā. "With the rise of Reza Shah and his form of authoritarianism, Nima sought safe haven in his beloved Yush. For the next sixteen years, he *all but completely withdrew from the literary and political worlds*." Italics added. It

Pahlavi program of modernization was physically inscribed within and by their neo-imperial architectural projects, but Nīmā's modernist foundations are located within the formal structure of his poetry.

Beyond the Introduction to *Afsānah*, Nīmā's poetry and poetic criticism betrays an overarching obsession with the foundations, forms, structures, building, and creation of poetry, which he approaches in terms of poetic craft. Nīmā's poetics emerge out of the intricate connections between his verse and the earlier Persian poetic tradition in both form and content. These links to the past are in continual discourse with Nīmā's self-styled *attitude of modernity*,[171] which Nīmā's poetic personae also take on. In order to understand the foundations of Nīmā's poetry, I now turn to what being modern meant to him and how his vision of modernity differs from not only Western conceptions of modernity but also from the state-sponsored Pahlavi modernity that emerged concurrently with Nīmā's modernist poetics in Iran.

Dealing with Western ideas about modernity in his book *We Have Never Been Modern*, Bruno Latour explains that conceiving of oneself as modern is more a matter of faith than an objective reality.[172] Latour posits that 'the Moderns' subscribe to what he calls 'the modern Constitution,' which depends on the neat separation of subject (society) and object (nature). Ultimately, however, this Constitution fails due to the presence of quasi-objects, hybrids that

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was during this retreat from the vicissitudes of Pahlavi modernity that Nīmā "assiduously spent the time delving into the Iranian and Western poetic traditions." *Eminent Persians*, 903.

[171] Foucault, "What is Enlightenment?" 39. Cf. also my discussion of how Najīb Maḥfūẓ presents this attitude of modernity in Arabic prose in my article, "Strange Bedfellows: The Crisis of Modernity in Najīb Maḥfūẓ's *al-Qāhira al-Jadīda* (*Cairo Modern*)," *Middle Eastern Literatures* 18:3, 264-282. http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/1475262X.2016.1199094. I draw on this article in my discussion of Bruno Latour, Marshall Berman, and Karl Marx in this chapter.

[172] In applying Foucault's thought to conceive of Nīmā's self-fashioning and turning to the work of Bruno Latour, I am led by Rastegar's comments in a footnote from his *Literary Modernity*, 149.

intervene on either side. For Latour, a crisis occurs since "*the proliferation of hybrids has saturated the constitutional framework of the moderns*."[173] Though he was known as the preeminent modernist in the Persian poetic tradition, Nīmā's poetics do not fall victim to this crisis and instead recognize and respond to the continued hybridization of subject and object in a world increasingly ordered along the lines of Enlightenment categorization.

Two terms frequently pop up in Nīmā's literary criticism, where he offers his particular vision of modernity: *ṭabīʿat* (nature) and *ṣanʿat* (craft). To understand Nīmā's critical process and how it overcomes the problems inherent to 'the modern Constitution,' we can place these terms within the context of 'the modern' as Latour defines it. *Ṭabīʿat* sits squarely in the realm of nature, the object. *Ṣanʿat* is the medium through which humans (who occupy the realm of society, or subject) *act upon* nature. However, Nīmā continually works to bridge the artificial divisions proposed by 'the modern Constitution.' Delving deep into Nīmā's poetics, Ahmad Karimi-Hakkak explains, "On the basis of the implied dichotomy between nature and culture, [Nīmā] rejects the notion that individuals can be separated from their environment."[174] In spurning this dichotomy, Nīmā is at odds with a foundational element of modernity as understood in the West and as 'the Moderns' conceive of it. Whereas Nīmā elaborates a poetics grounded in collective experience, Western political ideologies of modernity[175]—the ultimate results of the Enlightenment's push for categorization—depend on neat separations, specifically

[173] Bruno Latour, *We Have Never Been Modern*, Catherine Porter trans. (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1993 [1991]), 50-51. Italics in original.

[174] Ahmad Karimi-Hakkak, *Recasting Persian Poetry*, 242.

[175] The most extreme examples being Fascism and Communism, totalizing systems that depend on the complete and total regulation of every part of both society and nature. See Albright's comments on the two systems in the chapter "Communism, Fascism, and Later Modernism," in *Putting Modernism Together*, 291-310.

between nature and society, in their elaborations of an administrative, teleological modernity. As Horkheimer and Adorno put it, "Enlightenment stands in the same relationship to things as the dictator to human beings. He knows them to the extent that he can manipulate them."[176] Nīmā, on the other hand, emphasizes the interconnectivity of subject and object and the hybridity of existence that 'the Moderns' seek to overcome. Thus, Nīmā's attitude of modernity, though informed to a great extent by the Western philosophical tradition,[177] results from his recognition of the insurmountable presence of hybrids, things that defy the categorization required by 'the Moderns.'

Nīmā's modernist poetry overcomes the "artificialities" (*takallufāt*) of premodern and neoclassical Persian poetry through his use of a natural diction. Karimi-Hakkak argues that Nīmā "opposes the simplicity and naturalness of his own descriptions to the artificialities (*takallofat*) which have constrained the old poets in expressing their ideas poetically." While *ṣanʿat* has to do with poetic craft and "relates invariably to the means and mechanisms by which poems are produced,"[178] *ṣanʿat* and *ṭabīʿat* are not mutually exclusive for Nīmā, since good *ṣanʿat* can also be natural rather than artificial. Within Nīmā's poetics, the two are closely related in the practice of composing poetry, and—like with other seemingly opposed categories—Nīmā often collapses them together in a way reminiscent of the artistic creative process Heidegger outlines in his "Origin of the Work of Art": the source of both artist and art work is art.[179] By drawing his

[176] Max Horkheimer and Theodor Adorno, *Dialectic of Enlightenment: Philosophical Fragments*, Gunzelin Schmid Noerr ed., Edmund Jephcott trans. (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2002 [1947]), 6.

[177] A reader of Nīmā's *Arzish-i iḥsāsāt (va panj maqālah dar shiʿr va namāyish)* (Tihrān: Intishārāt-i Gūtinbirg, 2535 [1976]) cannot miss his frequent citations and discussions of Western thinkers and artists.

[178] Karimi-Hakkak, *Recasting Persian Poetry*, 240.

[179] Martin Heidegger, "The Origin of the Work of Art," *Poetry, Language, Thought*, Albert Hofstadter trans. (New York: HarperCollins, 2001), 75. Heidegger wrote the essay between 1935 and 1937, and it was first published in

poetry out of his own experiences, Nīmā works to make it more natural, closer to the realities of experience, and thus representative of the hybrid nature of existence.

Other than his will to overcome the 'artificial' constraints of earlier Persian poetry, what makes Nīmā's poems modernist? How do they fit into the development of modernity (as a broader national project) in Iran under the Pahlavis? We must now define the terms modernist, modernization, and modernity. Modernism, as an artistic movement, is generally understood as something separate from modernization. They are "hermetically sealed off from one another: 'modernization' in economics and politics, 'modernism' in art, culture and sensibility."[180] However, Marshall Berman also shows us how Karl Marx's works bridge this divide by being at one and the same time descriptive and representative of both modernization and modernism. Marx, Berman tells us, "can clarify the relationship between modernist culture and the bourgeois economy and society—the world of 'modernization'—from which it has sprung." Through Marx's critical insights in works like *The Communist Manifesto* and *Capital*, we see how the two categories of 'modernist' and 'modernization' melt together, defying the neat categorization social scientists and humanists might prefer. In Berman's words, "Marxism, modernism and the bourgeoisie are caught up in a strange dialectical dance, and if we follow their movements we can learn some important things about the modern world we all share."[181]

I find Berman's argument convincing in that we cannot easily distinguish between modernism and modernization as they are integral parts of each other. For my purposes, I suggest that both categories—overlapping as they may be—be understood as products of the

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[180] Marshall Berman, *All That Is Solid Melts Into Air: The Experience of Modernity* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1982), 88.

[181] Berman, *All That Is Solid*, 90.

attitude of modernity I mentioned above. That is, modernists and modernizers are in some way self-defined as such through their relationship with, to, or against a third category: modernity. Contra modernists (artists whose work we might consider to be part of an artistic movement called modernism) and modernizers (people—usually politicians, social engineers, etc.—intending to make a society modern), I leave modernity undefined.[182] I prefer to place it in the same inaccessible region inhabited by art in Heidegger's schema of the relation between art work and artist. From this realm beyond human experience, the abstract concept of modernity defines and is defined by how individual humans understand and react to it.

As a self-styled modernist poet, Nīmā offers a specific view of modernity within his critical and poetic work. To return to Latour's concept of the 'modern Constitution,' Nīmā's poetics do not rely on the separation of subject and object this Constitution requires and are instead dependent on "the inseparability of the two spheres of individual and social existence."[183] However this does not mean that critics should read Nīmā's poetry as a *reflection of* contemporary society. Rather, this poetry must be understood to be in a dynamic relationship with the context of its composition. If we consider Nīmā's poetics against Latour's definition of 'the modern Constitution,' Nīmā is able to overcome the contradictions inherent to projects of modernity driven by Enlightenment modes of thought by not distinguishing between society and

[182] Susan Stanford Friedman makes a strong case against any singular definition of modernity, exposing various scholars' suggestions to be, at best, flawed and, at worst, self-contradictory in her chapter "Definitional Excursions." *Planetary Modernisms*, 19-45. She sums up her exploration of the multiple meanings of modernity and modernism when she admits, "I have no expectation, therefore, of determining or discovering a fixed meaning for terms like *modernity* and *modernism*. I expect differences. […] I don't see fixity or plurality. I seek instead to confront directly the contradictory status of meanings." 26. Italics in original.

[183] Karimi-Hakkak, *Recasting Persian Poetry*, 245.

nature (or subject and object).[184] Instead of neatly ordering the world as society vs. nature or subject vs. object, Nīmā's poetry exists at the nexus of these categories. That is to say, in a dialectical relationship between subject (the lyric "I" or the poetic persona) and the object (the poem). Without the other, neither exists, and each side of this dialectical equation only comes to be through the inaccessible medium of art.

While we must first be cautious to not read Nīmā's poetry as merely a reflection of society we must also avoid considering it to be an inevitable outcome of Persian poetry's historical trajectory. Despite the many connections to earlier Persian poetry we can locate in Nīmā's verse, there is something novel, something that emerges only from that innate, intangible space inhabited by art and accessible only through the dialectic of artist and art work. As much as Nīmā's attitude of modernity formed from his being a part of a modernizing society, he still had to construct a foundation for this attitude within his poetry. That foundation is my focus for the rest of this section before moving on to analyze the symbolic possibilities Nīmā constructs upon this most basic element of his overall poetics.

Nīmā gives his own schema for this foundation in *Arzish-i iḥsāsāt* (*The Value of Feelings*), a collection of articles initially written for *Majallah-'i musīqī* (*The Journal of Music*) in 1939.[185] Characterizing the literary return of poets like Bahār as the result of "helplessness" (*ʿajz*), Nīmā argues for changing the overall system of Persian poetic criticism. As Karimi-Hakkak puts it, "[b]ecause of the changing nature of the interaction between poets and their

[184] My approach is here also informed by the Mohamed Tavakoli-Targhi's work on the institution of modernity in Iran during the nineteenth century. See especially Chapter 1 of *Refashioning Iran: Orientalism, Occidentalism and Historiography*, St. Anthony's Series (New York: Palgrave, 2001), 1-17.

[185] For an edition with editorial notes, see Nīmā Yushīj, *Arzish-i iḥsāsāt*, tawżīḥāt va ḥavāshī az Duktur Abū al-Qāsim Khubbatī ʿAṭāʾī (Tihrān: Bungāh-i Maṭbūʿāt-i Ṣafīʿalīshāh, 1335; 1956).

environments, imposing classical rules on contemporary poets is not only constraining but also futile" for Nīmā.[186] Nīmā's conception of *ṣanʿat* is tied to "the conditions of existence of which [the poet] is a part," Karimi-Hakkak adds, quoting Nīmā when he writes, "human beings do not simply take their materials [*mavād*] from nature; they make modifications [*taṣarrufāt*] in them in accordance with their own inclinations."[187] We find an overarching focus on the interconnection of artist and nature as mediated by poetic craft throughout *The Value of Feelings*, which, more than any other of Nīmā's critical writings, elaborates his modernist manifesto.

But a manifesto is nothing without action. Let us now turn to the fully-formed modernist poems Nīmā wrote years after *Afsānah*, many of which feature birds, popular harbingers of fate, tools for auguring the future, and symbols representing the poet. Nīmā frequently used birds as symbols in his poems, and he paved the way for other Iranian modernists like Furūgh Farrukhzād and Aḥmad Shāmlū who followed him in his innovative use of birds as stand-ins for the poet. Starting with "*Qū*" ("The Swan") in 1926, Nīmā composed several other poems titled after birds when he began seriously intervening on the prosodic form of Persian poetry in 1938 with "*Quqnūs*" ("The Phoenix"), including "*Ghurāb*" ("The Raven"; 1316 [1938]), "*Murgh-i gham*" ("The Bird of Grief"; 1317 [1938]), "*Murgh-i mujassamah*" ("The Statue-Bird"; 1318 [1939/40]), "*Shikastah par*" ("Broken-Winged"; 1319 [1940/41]), and "*Jughdī pīr*" ("An Old Owl"; 1320 [1941]).[188] I now turn to the symbolic role of the title birds in three of these poems, which formally embody the significance of Nīmā's reception of the premodern Arabic *ʿarūḍ*

[186] Karimi-Hakkak, *Recasting Persian Poetry,* 244.

[187] Karimi-Hakkak, *Recasting Persian Poetry*, 243-244. Transliterations in brackets modified. Quoting from Yūshīj, *Arzish* (1976), 85.

[188] See Nīmā Yūshīj, *Majmūʿah*, 224-225, 225-227, 233-234, 286-287, and 301. "*Mīkhandad*" ("It Laughs"; 1318 [1939/40]) from the same period also features a "*murgh-i ṭalāʾī*" ("golden bird"), *Majmūʿah*, 227.

system and through their symbolism metapoetically comment on the act of composing poetry at the beginning of poetic modernism in the Persian tradition.

Poet as Swan

Nīmā's modernist poetic vision predates *The Value of Feelings* by nearly two decades, going all the way back to the publishing of *Afsānah* in 1922. Nīmā developed this vision in his poetry through the second half of the 1920s to the late 1930s, when "*Quqnūs*" ("The Phoenix") appeared concurrent with the publication of *The Value of Feelings*. Birds play a critical role in the poems Nīmā composed as representatives of his modernist critical manifesto and show themselves to be yet another instance of transnational movement between the cultural traditions of ancient Mesopotamia.

For instance, consider the translinguistic movement of the words for swan and Phoenix in the classical and premodern Mediterranean and Near Eastern regions. According to Hellenist and scholar of birds in the ancient world W. Geoffrey Arnott, the whooper swan (Latin name *Cygnus cygnus*) "has a remarkably shaped trachea, convoluted inside of its breastbone; and when it dies, the final expiration of air from its collapsing lungs produces a 'wailing, flute-like sound given out quite slowly.'"[189] The whooper swan's name, *Cygnus* twice over, comes from the Greek *κύκνος*, an appellation that also went east in the philosophical work of Ibn Sīnā (d. 1037), where it still meant swan.[190] A century later when it appears in Farīd al-Dīn ʿAṭṭār's (d. 1221) *The*

[189] W. Geoffrey Arnott, "Swan Songs," *Greece & Rome* 24, no. 2 (Oct. 1977), 152. See also Mark Brazil, *The Whooper Swan* (London: T & A D Poyser, 2003), especially Chapter 2, "Swan Culture."

[190] Ibn Sīnā uses the same spelling ʿAṭṭār does (*quqnus*, with a *ḍammah* in place of the *wāw*) but is certainly referencing a swan—not the Phoenix—in his *al-Shifāʾ*. See Ibn Sīnā, *al-Shifāʾ*, *al-Manṭiq*, 4, *al-Qiyās*, rājaʿahu waqaddama la-hu Ibrāhīm Madkūr, bi-taḥqīq Saʿīd Zāyid (al-Qāhirah: al-Hayʾah al-ʿĀmmah li-Shuʾūn al-Amīriyyah, 1384; 1964), 217, 222, and 505.

Conference of the Birds—an account of a group of birds' mystical quest to discover Being—the *quqnūs* has a beak with a hundred holes and sings beautifully. In the story, when the *quqnūs* is about to die, it collects kindling around itself as it sings a mournful swan song. Finally, it sets itself alight on its pyre and is reborn in the ashes. The Persian *quqnūs*[191] is equivalent to the Phoenix of Greek myth, but its name comes from the Greek word for swan. ʿAṭṭār goes on to say that it was the *quqnūs* that first taught man how to sing.[192] Nīmā knowingly chose both the swan (*qū*)—almost certainly a Whooper swan[193]—and the *quqnūs* to symbolically represent the poet as he made his initial interventions in the history of Persian prosody. He did so because their songs announce an ending, a death out of which something new is born that still retains elements of the old.

Nīmā was an expert on the premodern system of Arabic *ʿarūḍ*,[194] and his *dīvān* is full of poems written in the traditional style. I have already mentioned 1922's *Afsānah*—heralded by

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[191] Though I have been no more successful than Muḥāmmad Riżā Shāfīʿī Kadkanī, who recently completed an edition of *Manṭiq al-ṭayr*, in finding the philological link between the Persian *quqnūs* and the Greek *κύκνος* (Farīd al-Dīn Muḥammad ibn Ibrāhīm Nīshābūrī [ʿAṭṭār], *Manṭiq al-ṭayr*, muqaddamah, taṣḥīḥ va taʿlīqāt Muḥammad Riżā Shāfīʿī Kadkanī (Tihrān: Sukhan, 1388 [2010]), 649-651), I am convinced that the two birds are connected by their 'swan song,' which each of them sings as death approaches.

[192] For ʿAṭṭār's whole account of the *quqnūs* story, see Farīd al-Dīn ʿAṭṭār, *Manṭiq al-ṭayr*, bi-taṣḥīḥ va ihtimām-i Muḥammad Javād Mashkūr, bā muqaddimah va taʿlīqāt, 2nd ed. (Tihrān: Kitābfurūshi-yi Tihrān, 1341 [1962]), 153-155. Translation by Afkham Darbandi and Dick Davis, 1984. http://www.laphamsquarterly.org/magic-shows/ashes.

[193] The Whooper (*Cygnus cygnus*) is the swan associated with the 'swan song.' Furthermore, its range extends to the Caspian region where Nīmā was from. *The Handbook of British Birds*, H. F. Witherby, F. C. R. Jourdain, Norman F. Ticehurst, and Bernard W. Tucker, Vol. 3 (London: H. F. & G Witherby, Ltd., 1939), 171. In Persian, the Whooper is appropriately called *qū-yi faryādkash*. *Fihrist-i pīshnihādī-'i asāmī-yi parandigān-i Īrān*, Sāymūn Jirvīs Rīd [Simon Jervis Read] ed. (Tihrān: Dānishgāh-i Tihrān, 1337 [1958/59]), 3.

[194] The most important element of Arabic and Persian modernist prosody, at least initially, is its retention of some features from the Arabic *ʿarūḍ*, which provided the prosodic base for both poetic traditions for over a millennium. The Arabic *ʿarūḍ* came to Persia in the aftermath of the Islamic conquests in the seventh century CE. Following the Islamic conquests during the seventh century, Middle Persian, the language of the Sasanian Empire (r. 224-651), reemerged with a vocabulary inundated with Arabic words. This language is now called New Persian, or just Persian. Though New Persian kept many features of Middle Persian grammar, Middle Persian prosody disappeared, and New Persian poetry was written according to the *ʿarūḍ* patterns of the Arab conquerers, the same patterns al-Khalīl catalogued in the eighth century CE. Arabic and New Persian poetry thus looks quite similar in terms of its form on a page; two hemistich lines arranged in columns with a monorhyme at the end of each line and a single

many critics as a "harbinger" or "manifesto" of Nīmā's modernist project[195]— which was written in a form based largely on the traditional *musammaṭ*. *Qū,* "The Swan," composed on 20 Farvardīn 1305 (10 April 1926) is the earliest of Nīmā's poems we might consider to herald the changes he would bring to Persian poetry, though his earlier work also smacks of iconoclasm. "The Swan" is a *chahārpārah*, meaning that it has an ABAB rhyme scheme within each of its eleven stanzas. In al-Khalīl ibn Aḥmad's *ʿarūḍ* system, the meter is *al-baḥr al-khafīf* (the "light" meter) sextameter[196] with lines arranged in a single column. Here are the first four:

Ṣubḥ chun rūyi mīgushāyad mihr
Rū-yi daryā-yi sarkash ū khāmūsh
Mīkashad mawj-hā-yi nīlī chihr
Jabbah'ī az ṭalā-yi nāb bih dūsh

Nīmā is not alone in the innovative placement of the two hemistichs of each line into a single column, as this had been done before in Persian poetry. The lines could just as easily have been arranged in two columns, in which case the poem would look like any other poem in traditional meter:

ṣubḥ chun rūyi mīgushāyad mihr *rū-yi daryā-yi sarkash ū khāmūsh*
mīkashad mawj-hā-yi nīlī chihr *jabbah'ī az ṭalā-yi nāb bih dūsh*

I selected *"Qū*" to demonstrate Nīmā's expertise with premodern meter because, although its meter is traditional, its content is entirely new to Persian poetry. As Amr Taher Ahmed has pointed out, this is the first time that a poet used the figure of a swan as a symbol for

meter that repeats throughout the poem are standard. The transnational interconnection of Arabic and New Persian prosody is undeniable. However, older Middle Persian verse seems to have been stress-based, rather than quantity-based as Arabic poetry is, and rhymeless. Mary Boyce, "The Parthian 'Gōsān' and Iranian Minstrel Tradition," *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society of Great Britain and Ireland*, nos. 1/2 (April, 1957), 40.

[195] Milani, *Eminent Persians*, 902.

[196] Thiesen, *A Manual of Classical Persian Prosody*, 243. See also Wright, *A Grammar of the Arabic Language*, Vol. 2, 367-368.

the poet in all of Persian literature, the swan not having been among the animals usually found in earlier verse.[197] The poem is only forty-four lines long, and I give a full translation here before my critical commentary in which I show how Nīmā uses the swan to metapoetically present the act of writing poetry. This is Nīmā's "The Swan."

Dawn, when the face of the sun blooms
Over the rebellious, silent sea
The blue waves put on a face,
A cloak of pure gold on their shoulders.

Morning, cold and wet, in those moments
When the wind passes over the sea,
The tuberose, beneath the dew,
Bathes itself from head to toe.

Morning, when isolation of
Space and time enthralls and endears,
Not far off from hidden islands
The figure of the swan appears.

He's like a bouquet of flowers
Alone in whispers of water
Surrounded by a mossy green
He's lovelier than greenery.

He shakes his feet, perhaps
To drive fatigue from his body.
He opens his white wings
And takes off over the plain.

Toward the sea he flies,
To that low spot of dawn
Leaving this stubborn world of ours,
Flying through the darkness.

He goes into a dark lair
With imagination as a companion
In a bright line thin as a hair,
He sees things deserving of a swan:

But a far-off cloud remains,

[197] *La «Révolution littéraire»*, 378.

The waves keep crashing,
And in this place, no one knows
What images will come apart. (*Kih chih ashkāl mīshavad judā*)

Yet the bird from deep blue islands,
At the very moment he finds solitude
No longer thinks about once upon a time (*sīnah khālī zi fikr-i būd u nabūd*)[198]
And starts forming thoughts of the sea.

He casts a glance at the sun,
A glance at washed out colors,
And with a flap of white wings
Takes off over deep waters.

Against all expectations, he's (*bar khalāf-i taṣavvur-i hamah, ū*)[199]
Still crazy for the water's tale.
Whether anyone sees the swan,
He sleeps in the embrace of waves.[200]

Lines 25-32 show how Nīmā conceives of the swan as poet. "[The swan] goes into a dark lair / With imagination as a companion / In a bright line thin as a hair, / He sees things deserving of a swan: // But a far-off cloud remains, / The waves keep crashing, / And in this place, no one knows, / What images will come apart." Nīmā's use of the swan as a stand-in for the poet allows him to offer a metaperspective on the act of creating poetry. The swan, like the poet, ventures into the unknown with his imagination (*khayāl*) as his only companion, and, also mirroring the poet, he has a special ability of seeing things others cannot. However, his creative vision is unruly, and he—like the poet—cannot tell what will come of what he sees. In Persian, line 32 is

[198] *Būd u nabūd* literally means "was and was not" and is related to the traditional opening of a folk tale: *yakī būd va yakī nabūd* ("one was, and one was not"). I attempt to capture this meaning by using the traditional opening of a fairy tale in English.

[199] I translate *taṣavvur* as "expectations" to respect the syllabic balance of these final lines and to employ the natural-sounding English idiom "against all expectations," though the word also carries resonances of perception or imagination.

[200] Nīmā, *Majmūʿah*, 114-116.

kih chih ashkāl mīshavand judā, and *ashkāl* (images) might also be understood to mean 'forms,' hinting at Nīmā's later poetric experimentation and his testing of the formal boundaries of premodern Persian prosody. In this poem, however, Nīmā remains grounded in traditional form while pushing the limits of the sayable[201] in his content. His swan-as-poet disrupts the history of Persian verse in ways other than the stark novelty of its symbolism; Nīmā's continual use of rural, natural scenes also contrasts sharply with the typically urban setting of Persian poetry.[202] Additionally, by portraying the swan as a solitary figure, the poem implicitly positions the modernist poet as an individual on the margins of society just as Nīmā presented himself as disconnected from the urbane trappings of modernity.[203]

Overall, "The Swan" upends arguments that Iranian poets required new, freer poetic *forms* in order to express new, freer poetic *content*. Rather, we find Nīmā here working closely with the earlier poetic tradition (particularly with form) to create something new yet similar, and certainly not breaking away from traditional prosody. Instead, Nīmā places his symbolic intervention on poetic content within a poetic structure still based wholly on premodern Persian (and Arabic) prosody.

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[201] In so doing, Nīmā's poetry exemplifies Rancière's argument about the political impetus lying behind all modern art. "Politics, before all else," he proposes, "is an intervention in the visible and the sayable." Rancière, *Dissensus*, 37.

[202] Karimi-Hakkak, "Nima Yushij: A Life," 16.

[203] Although Nīmā worked as a government bureaucrat in the Archives Division of the Ministry of Finance during the 1920's, he sartorially set himself apart by wearing a traditional robe, boots, and fur hat, completing the look by carrying a knife at his waist. "He needed all that," Karimi-Hakkak explains, "to let his bosses know that he was not like the others. The 'knife at the waist' image, which also surfaces in accounts written by his colleagues, tells of the basic incongruity between Nima's upbringing and the position he now held in the stolid bureaucracy of 1920s Iran." Karimi-Hakkak, "Nima Yushij: A Life," 34.

The Phoenix Rises: Building an "Imaginary Edifice"

Later in his career, Nīmā did innovate on premodern Persian prosody by making the poetic foot (*rukn*—literally a pillar or column—in Persian; *tafʿīlah* in Arabic) the basis of the poetic line. He repeated combinations of feet any number of times in a single line, similar to the method of the Iraqi free verse pioneers Badr Shākir al-Sayyāb, Nāzik al-Malāʾikah, and their followers, but different in that Nīmā often used meters consisting of different poetic feet (unlike the Iraqis and against al-Malāʾikah's prescriptions for Arabic free verse).[204] Nīmā's initial experiments with Persian prosodic form emerge most clearly in "*Quqnūs*" ("The Phoenix"), first published in 1938, just after Nīmā joined the newly-founded *Journal of Music* in 1937.[205] (Arabist readers should note that "*Quqnūs*" comes a full decade before al-Malāʾikah and al-Sayyāb's first free verse poems.)

Nīmā gives some brief comments on his poetic style in his 1946 address to the Iranian Writer's Congress.

> In my free poems (*ashʿār-i āzād-i man*) meter and rhyme are accounted for differently, but the hemistichs (*miṣraʿ-hā*) do not shorten or lengthen out of mere flights of fancy. I believe in an ordered lack of order (*man barā-yi bīnaẓmī ham bi*[*h*-]*naẓmī iʿtiqād dāram*). Every one of my words connects to the next one by way of a specific rule (*qāʿidah-'i daqīq*), and for me composing free poetry (*shʿir-i āzād surūdan*) is more difficult than the other [i.e., composing traditional verse].[206]

Elements of craft (*sanʿat*) suffuse Nīmā's definition of his poetic process. He conceives of himself as a builder using the tools available to him as a poet (his own experience, words

[204] Al-Malāʾikah, *Qaḍāyā al-shiʿr al-muʿāṣir* (1967), 34.

[205] Abbas Milani, *Eminent Persians*, 904. Nīmā would publish fifteen poems in the journal's thirty-eight issues. For more on the journal and Nīmā's experiences there, see Karimi-Hakkak, "Nima Yushij: A Life," 50-53.

[206] *Nakhustīn kungirah*, 64. Nīmā later proposed a system for his critical approach to writing poetry. "Our literature must change in every aspect. […] The main thing is that the methodology must change and give poetry the descriptive and narrative model that exists in human intellect." *Ḥarf-hā-yi hamsāyah*, 56; *The Neighbor Says*, 63.

themselves, and poetic form). Additionally, Nīmā tells his audience that composing "free poetry" is no simple task for him and is in fact more difficult to do than it would be to compose verse in the traditional style. In what follows, I demonstrate how some of the elements of what Nīmā terms an "ordered lack of order" work within his modernist poems and what these innovations mean within the history of the Persian poetic tradition.

The first lines of "*Quqnūs*" show Nīmā's intervention on premodern Persian poetic form and give an early example of the style he would later outline in his comments to the Writer's Congress. These lines are transliterated as follows.

Quqnūs, *murgh-i khushkhvān*, *āvāzah-yi jahān*,
Āvārah māndah az vazish-i bād-hā-yi sard,
Bar shākh-i khīzarān,
Binshastah ast fard.
Bar gird-i ū bih har sar-i shākhī parandigān.
Ū nālah-hā-yi gumshudah tarkīb mīkunad,
Az rishtah-hā-yi pārah-yi ṣad-hā ṣidā-yi dūr,
Dar abr-hā-yi mis̲l-i khaṭ-ī[207] *tīrah rū-yi kūh,*
Dīvār-i yak banā-yi[208] *khayālī*
Mīsāzad.

The meter is a version of *al-baḥr al-muḍāriʿ* (the "similar") from the Khalīlian system,[209] a popular meter in the premodern Persian tradition. These are the traditional feet of that meter represented by *tafʿīlāt* (*arkān* in Persian), with missing feet and syllables struck through. Beside the lines are symbols indicating the pattern of short and long syllables actually present in each.

mafʿūlu fāʿilātu mafāʿīlu fāʿilun — ⏑ / — ⏑ — / ⏑ — ⏑ / — ⏑ —
mafʿūlu fāʿilātu mafāʿīlu fāʿilun — ⏑ / — ⏑ — / ⏑ — ⏑ / — ⏑ —
mafʿūlu fāʿilātu ~~mafāʿīlu fāʿilun~~ — ⏑ / — ⏑ —

[207] *Sic*. The meter requires the word to scan short - long: *kha* + *ṭ-ī*. The repeated letter in an Arabic word with a *shaddah* (the gemination marker) is often dropped in Persian.

[208] I prefer to use the contemporary Persian pronunciation (*banā*) of the Arabic word *bināʾ* here.

[209] Called in Persian *mużāriʿ-i mus̲amman-i akhrab-i makfūf-i mah̲z̲ūf*. See also Wright, *A Grammar of the Arabic Language*, Vol. 2, 364-365.

mafʿūlu fā ʿilātu ~~*mafā ʿīlu fā ʿilun*~~	– – ˘ / – ˘ – ˘
mafʿūlu fā ʿilātu mafā ʿīlu fā ʿilun	– – ˘ / – ˘ – ˘/ ˘ – – ˘ / – ˘ –
mafʿūlu fā ʿilātu mafā ʿīlu fā ʿilun	– – ˘ / – ˘ – ˘/ ˘ – – ˘ / – ˘ –
mafʿūlu fā ʿilātu mafā ʿīlu fā ʿilun	– – ˘ / – ˘ – ˘/ ˘ – – ˘ / – ˘ –
mafʿūlu fā ʿilātu mafā ʿīlu fā ʿilun	– – ˘ / – ˘ – ˘/ ˘ – – ˘ / – ˘ –
mafʿūlu fā ʿilātu mafā ~~*ʿīlu fā ʿilun*~~	– – ˘ / – ˘ – ˘/ ˘ – –
mafʿūlu ~~*fā ʿilātu mafā ʿīlu fā ʿilun*~~	– – –[210]

Lines 3 and 4 stop midway through, but the first two usual poetic feet remain unaffected. While this is out of the ordinary, it only hints at the metrical experimentation to come. Lines 9 and 10 break with the norm in the jarring string of five long syllables, ending with *mīsāzad* (*mafʿūlu-f*), in which the normally short final syllable of the first foot lengthens, incorporating the first letter of the next theoretical foot (the *f* in *fā ʿilātu*), which is not present in the line. The meter thus calls out for the reader's attention here in line 10 of the following translation.

> The Phoenix, sweet-singing bird, known across the world
> made homeless by gusts of cold wind
> sits, alone, on
> a stalk of bamboo.
> The other birds gather around him on every branch.
>
> He composes lost laments
> from the tattered shreds of a thousand distant voices,
> in clouds like a dark line on the mountain,
> the wall of an imaginary edifice, he
> builds.[211]

The plodding succession of syllables in *mīsāzad*, which means "he builds," encapsulates Nīmā's idea of poetic modernism in a single word. At the same moment the poet creates something new, she also destroys its source, or—at the very least—shakes its foundations. In line 10, metrics and content stand at odds with each other, and their dissonance sounds out the inner workings of

[210] Amr Taher Ahmed gives the entire metrical breakdown of the poem in *La «Révolution littéraire»*, 423-427, along with a translation into French.

[211] I have consulted translations by Kaveh Bassiri and Hamid Dabashi in rendering these lines. See http://twolinespress.com/phoenix/ and "Nima Yushij and the Constitution of a National Subject," *The World is My Home*, 163.

Nīmā's poetry. This single word, *mīsāzad*, displays Nīmā's modernist poetics within itself by making a claim to building something new while simultaneously breaking away from the premodern metrical foundations of Persian prosody, if only for a moment, with its slow sequence of three long syllables in a row: ¯ ¯ ¯.

Here too Nīmā's terminology of construction and building is part and parcel of his modernist vision. The "wall of an imaginary edifice" from line 9 is *dīvār-i yak banā-yi khayālī*. *Banā*, from the Arabic word *binā'*, means building or structure. I have translated it here as "edifice" because of the dual meanings of this word in English, which is used to mean a large, stately building or to figuratively refer to a system of belief.[212] Nīmā's Phoenix is simultaneously involved in tearing down and rebuilding the system of Persian prosody, much in the same way the mythical Phoenix is only reborn by destroying itself. To borrow some lines from the Iraqi poet Badr Shākir al-Sayyāb on the same theme in his poem "*al-Qaṣīdah wa-l-ʿanqā'*" ("The Poem and the Phoenix"),[213] "If he wants, / let him destroy the past," al-Sayyāb says of his own poet-phoenix, "for things only rise / over their charred ashes / scattered on the horizon…."[214] In *Quqnūs*, the title bird not only represents the traditional myth of the Phoenix but also the process behind Nīmā's modernism. Nīmā presents his poetry itself as emerging from the ashes of the past. However, this modernist poetry—also like the new Phoenix birthed out of the ashes of the

[212] "edifice, n." *Oxford English Dictionary Online* (Oxford University Press, December 2015). http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/59535?redirectedFrom=edifice.

[213] In Persian, the *ʿanqā'*, "the long-necked female bird," is "the symbol of everything that exists only in the world of imagination" and equivalent to the mystical Simurgh made famous in ʿAṭṭār's *Manṭiq al-ṭayr*. Annemarie Schimmel, *A Two-Colored Brocade: The Imagery of Persian Poetry* (Chapel Hill, NC: The University of North Carolina Press, 1992), 188.

[214] *Badr Shākir al-Sayyāb: qasā'id*, akhtārahā wa-qaddama la-hā Adūnīs (Bayrūt: Manshūrāt Dār al-Ādāb, 1967), 22. My translation is on *Jadaliyya*, "Badr Shakir al-Sayyab: The Poem and the Phoenix," *Jadaliyya*, 24 December 2014. http://www.jadaliyya.com/pages/index/20361/badr-shakir-al-sayyab_the-poem-and-the-phoenixn.

old—shares many qualities with the older tradition, particularly in its prosodic form. This constitutes the *banā* found in these lines, the edifice upon which Nīmā's modernist imagination (*khayāl*) is firmly based.

Nīmā's use of metrics in *Quqnūs* calls attention to the act of composing poetry itself, which the poem's opening verses describe in metaphorical terms. The poem strikes a balance between the presence of premodern prosody and what might at first seem like a blatant deviation from its prescribed norms. However, as we have seen in the symbolic feet representative of the meter laid out above, the poem does not in fact break with traditional prosody but rather develops on it; the formal innovation of the poet here only gains its meaning when understood within the context of the *ʿarūḍ*. While previous studies have focused on the transnational links between Nīmā's prosodic experiments and French Symbolist poetry,[215] the metrical connections between Nīmā's poetry and modernist Arabic poetry remain largely unacknowledged. However, as we can see here, the *ʿarūḍ* continued to play a foundational part in Nīmā's modernist poetics.

Through the experimentations on premodern meter found in its opening lines, "*Quqnūs*" gives the reader insight into the metapoetic perspective Nīmā presents in the rest of the poem. Not only does Nīmā offer an innovation on premodern prosodic patterns throughout "*Quqnūs,*" but he also outlines his modernist poetic process in which the poet-Phoenix "composes lost laments / from the tattered shreds of a thousand distant voices." We are left to ask whose voices these might be.

[215] E.g. Amr Taher Ahmed's book, in which he traces the connections between Nīmā's use of the swan and the Phoenix and the French poet Mallarmé's "*Sonnet du Cygne*," adding to the Iranian critic Riżā Barāhinī's earlier work. Barāhinī argues that Nīmā was especially influenced by Mallarmé, particularly in his move from Romanticism to Symbolism with "*Quqnūs*." Cf. Amr Taher Ahmed, *La «Révolution littéraire»,* 373-391 and Riżā Barāhinī, *Ṭalā dar mis*, 237. Another Iranian scholar has also done comparative work on Nīmā's "*Quqnūs*" and Baudelaire's "*L'Albatros*." See Muḥammad Ḥusayn Javārī, *Taḥlīl-i taṭbīqī-'i "Quqnūs" va "Ālbātrūs"; dū shiʿr az Nīmā va Būdalar*, *Pazhūhash'hā-yi zabān va adabiyyāt-i Fārsī (ʿilmī – pazhūhashī)* (Danishgāh-i Iṣfahān: Dānishgāh-i Adabiyyāt va ʿUlūm-i Insānī), no. 1 (Bahār, 1388 [Spring, 2009]): 17-30.

Fortunately, the poem intertextually cites its source in its first line. If we compare Nīmā's line, "The Phoenix, sweet-singing bird, known across the world" (*Quqnūs, murgh-i khushkhvān, āvāzah-yi jahān*) with ʿAṭṭār's "The Phoenix is a peerless bird, heart-enrapturing // This bird's abode is Hindustan" (*hast quqnus ṭurfah murghī dilsatān // mawżaʿ-ī īn murgh dar Hindūstān*),[216] we hear the sonic relationship between the two lines. While Nīmā does not engage in a poetic imitation by copying ʿAṭṭār's meter, he does reference his predecessor in his rhyme: "*ān*" (*khushkhvān*, *jahān*, *dilsatān*, *Hindūstān*). The intertextual reference offers us a key to unlock the processes behind Nīmā's modernist poetry, for the poem betrays its secrets through its intertextuality. The far-off voices that the Phoenix recombines in what is ostensibly new poetry are echoes of the Persian poetic tradition.[217] They are echoes of premodern prosodic, rhythmic forms.

Nīmā's prosodic innovations indicate, on the one hand, his thorough knowledge of the requirements of Arabic *ʿarūḍ* and, on the other, the possibility of its development in the Iranian context. Nīmā's modernist prosody is variously said to be closer to everyday speech,[218] or more musical,[219] or 'freer' in the sense that a phrase can extend beyond the confines of a single line or that an idea can be expressed in a single foot rather than a full two hemistichs. However, in "*Quqnūs,*" the poem that would launch the modernist movement in Persian, and other poems

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[216] ʿAṭṭār, *Manṭiq al-ṭayr*, 153. I have consulted the translation found in Farīdu'd-Dīn ʿAṭṭār, *The Speech of the Birds: Manṭiq't-Tair*, Peter Avery trans. (Cambridge, UK: The Islamic Texts Society, 2001), 208. Cf. also the Darbandi and Davis translation, http://www.laphamsquarterly.org/magic-shows/ashes.

[217] In *The Neighbor Says*, Nīmā further outlines his process of composition as it relates to the poetic tradition. "You must be drawn to the past of man and you must search within it. You must sink into the grave of the dead (*bih mazār-i murdigān furū biravī*); you must go to the solitary ruins (*kharābah-hā-yi khalvat*) and distant deserts (*biyābān-hā-yi dūr*) and cry out […]." *Ḥarf-hā-yi hamsāyah,* 7; *The Neighbor Says*, 26.

[218] Girdhari Tikku with Alireza Anushiravani, *A Conversation with Modern Persian Poets* (Costa Mesa, CA: Mazda Publishers, 2004), 18.

[219] Nīmā Yūshīj, *Ḥarf-hā-yi hamsāyah*; *The Neighbor Says*, *passim*.

from the same period, Nīmā's modernist innovations remain rooted in the rules of the centuries-old tradition of Arabic prosody.

After making an initial prosodic intervention in its first stanza, "*Quqnūs*" goes on to paint a mysterious, dark scene punctuated by natural phenomenon like sunlight, crashing waves, and a jackal's howl yet also populated by the lonely figure of a peasant. Alone in his hut, he lights a small lamp, while other people pass by in the distance.

> Ever since the yellow of the sun upon the waves
> faded away, and the jackal's howl
> rang out over the shore, and the peasant (*mard-i dihātī*)
> lit a hidden light in his home,
> his eyes reflect red a tiny flame that
> draws a line under night's two wild eyes
> and at far off points (*v-andar nuqāṭ-i dūr*)
> people pass by (*khalq-and dar ʿubūr*).[220]

The motif of the urban passer-by is a seminal feature in modernist poetry, from Baudelaire's direct address to a woman passing on a Paris street in "*À une passante*"[221] to T.S. Eliot's "Unreal city" in *The Waste Land*'s version of London. "Unreal city / Under the brown fog of a winter dawn, / A crowd flowed over London Bridge, so many, / I had not thought death had undone so many. / Sighs, short and infrequent, were exhaled, / And each man fixed his eyes before his feet."[222] A modern society reordered by capital; poet as witness to an age. In these

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[220] Naficy's analysis of this line and others from the first stanza exemplifies readings of Nīmā's poetry based in political interpretation. "Here," he writes, "the reader, for the first time, gets to know the *political symbolism* of what I call, [*sic*] 'Night Poetry,' in Nimâ's work, in which 'night' represents poetical evil and the sun symbolizes freedom and happiness. Also notice the significance of the word *khalq*, meaning the people, which in this period begins to find a special political flavor implying a Marxist overtone, differentiated from the word *mellat* (nation), which has a nationalistic stance." *Modernism and Ideology*, 50. First set of italics added.

[221] Charles Baudelaire, *The Flowers of Evil*, Marthiel and Jackson Mathews eds. (New York: New Directions, 1989), 337. Translation in the same edition by C. F. MacIntyre, 118. The poem was first published in 1855.

[222] T.S. Eliot, *The Waste Land*, Michael North ed. (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2001), 7. North notes that Eliot's description of London here is in fact based on another of Baudelaire's poems, "*Le septs vieillards*" ("The Seven Old Men," 1859), which opens "*Fourmillante cité*, *cité pleine de rêves*, / *Où le spectre en plein jour*

modernist poems, the poet's keen eye for detail seeks to unveil the deeper reality of everyday moments. Nīmā's *Quqnūs* is no different. The peasant (*mard-i dihātī*; literally a "village man") and his lamp shining out weakly into the night are contrasted with other people (*khalq*) far away, who do not know or ignore the challenges of the night. The rhyming of *dūr* (far) and *ʿubūr* (passing) further ties the people up in the distance, sheltering them from the reality the peasant experiences in his countryside solitude.

In these lines, the simple act of lighting a lamp initiates a symbolic mode that would later become the primary critical focus of his Iranian readers. As night falls in the wilderness, the peasant's "hidden light" shines out into the darkness, a glimmer of hope in a gloomy scene and the only solace in his lonely existence. The dichotomy of night (*shab*) and day, the sun, daybreak, the cock's crow, etc. represents, for many critics writing about Nīmā, his allegorical representation of a repressive political environment.[223] But when the poem returns to the Phoenix, the binary relationship of night and day (or dark and light) shifts and disappears. The Phoenix takes off from its perch and flies away, passing through "the light *and* dark of this long night" (*bā rawshanī* va *tīragī-'i īn shab-i dirāz*) to arrive at its goal, the fire where it will meet its end and new beginning and bring life and death together. Night and day collapse into one long night (now standing in for a lifetime) that the Phoenix flies through to reach the fire that will lead to its rebirth. Following this lifetime of night, the final fire represents the ultimate unknown: death. But whether or not this fiery hell offers salvation in the end remains to be seen.

> The bird, that rare song, hidden as he is
> rises from where he is perched

raccroche le passant!" ("Ant-seething city, city full of dreams, / Where ghosts by daylight tug the passer's sleeve."). Baudelaire, *The Flowers of Evil*, 331. Trans. by Roy Campbell, 111.

[223] Paul Losensky outlines this critical approach in the initial pages of his "'To Tell Another Tale of Mournful Terror': Three of Nima's Songs of the Night," (*Essays on Nima Yushij*, 139-172) after which he proceeds to challenge such binary readings and suggest other ways we might understand the meaning of Nīmā's night poems.

through things tangled up
with the light and dark of this long night (*bā rawshanī va tīragī-'i īn shab-i dirāz*),
he
passes.
A flame out ahead, he
sees.

As the Phoenix struggles to free itself from night, the other birds crowding around it replace the human passers-by. The Phoenix, like the poet, bears the burdens of poetic perception, but the other birds in the poem merely deal with basic survival in a barren land. The following lines describe a desolate scene reminiscent of Eliot's *The Waste Land*. The land is "without plants, without air," and the other birds struggle to eke out an existence there. But their struggle does not take on the cosmic nature of the Phoenix's. The Phoenix fights against existence itself to escape from its unending cycle. While the other birds are content to limit their experience of reality to the everyday tasks of sleeping and eating and to only entertain dreams of "a harvest of fire" (*kharmanī za-ātash*), the Phoenix lives for the impending flames. To live like the other birds "would be an unnameable pain" (*ranjī buvad k-az ān natavānand nām burd*), more painful than continuing its struggle.

In a place without plants, without air,
the stubborn sun breaks on the rocks,
land and life are nothing special here. (*Nah īn zamīn va zindagī-ash chīz-i dilkash ast*)[224]
He senses that the hopes of birds like him
are dark as smoke, even if some of their dreams
are like a harvest of fire
sparkling in the eye and in their white morning.
He senses that if his life
passed by like other birds
in sleeping and eating
it would be an unnameable pain.

[224] *Dilkash* literally means "captivating" or "enchanting," and a literal translation might be, "Land and life of this place are not enchanting things."

Although the Phoenix's death and rebirth are imminent and assured, the poem (mirroring ʿAṭṭār's version of the story) is not hopeful for the new life to come after death. In these lines, "*Quqnūs*" introduces a theme I will trace through all the Arabic and Persian modernist poetry I analyze in the dissertation. The central feature of this poetry's incorporation of myths of death and rebirth is its interrogation of the cycle, its will to break free of continual returns. Solely political readings of Arabic and Persian modernist poetry fail to account for the pessimism inherent to these poets' use of myths of resurrection and rebirth because they operate within a sequence of dichotomies: first colonialism vs. self-determination and second authoritarianism vs. democracy. Contrarily, I believe a constitutional ambivalence about the de-colonial moment and the rise of the nation state lies at the core of Arabic and Persian modernist poetry. This ambivalence is embodied in symbolic figures such as the Phoenix, which remains stuck in the cycle of death and rebirth indefinitely in the same way colonial subjects remain subjects precisely because of the trappings of citizenship the nation state hoists upon them. The predetermined teleology of the Phoenix's lonely life—and, I would also argue, of the atomized modern citizen whom progress has uprooted from tradition—is not one of happy, productive progress for either ʿAṭṭār or Nīmā. Moreover, we cannot reduce the bird's struggle to politics alone. ʿAṭṭār uses the Phoenix's story to admonish his audience about the inevitability of death. "If you were given all the phoenix's years / Still you would have to die when death appears. / For years he sings in solitary pain / And must companionless, unmated, reign; / No children cheer his age and at his death / His ash is scattered by the wind's cold breath."[225] Nīmā selects the Phoenix as his subject because, in combination with the metrical innovations he introduces in "*Quqnūs*,"

[225] Trans. Darbandi and Davis, http://www.laphamsquarterly.org/magic-shows/ashes.

it embodies the modernist poet's experience.[226] The Phoenix, like the poet, hopes to break free of the cyclical system it is stuck in though its end is already known. Nīmā's continued reliance on traditional Persian prosodic rhythm formally represents this conflict in the way his poetry seems to break away from its precursors but actually remains closely bound up with them.

Just as Nīmā does not escape the overwhelming influence of traditional verse, the Phoenix cannot avoid its eternal fate. The final stanza begins with four tightly knit lines, rhyming ABBA. The "B" lines also include a *radīf* (or 'refrain'), an entire word which follows the rhyme letter.[227] The combination of the *radīf* with a two-letter rhyme (*yāʾ* and *lām*; "*īl"*) further ties lines 38 and 39 together. Moreover, Nīmā employs a *tarṣīʿ* (roughly equivalent to isocolon)[228] with the words *tajlīl* and *tabdīl*, both nominalizations of Arabic verbs in the same pattern, accentuating the overall parallel structure of the lines. The extended *tarṣīʿ* of *tajlīl yāftah* and *tabdīl yāftah* limns the transition that occurs between the two lines because of their exactly equivalent metrical weight. Through their metrical and sonic balance, they represent the nexus of

[226] S. Hessampour and S.F. Sadat Sharifi explore the concept of solitude as elaborated in "*Quqnūs*" at length in "*Barrasīʾi ʿanāṣir-i mudirnism dar shiʿr-i Quqnūs*, *Majallah-ʾi shiʿr-pazhūhī* (*Būstān-i adab*) *Dānishgāh-i Shīrāz* 5, no. 1 (Bahār, 1392 [Spring, 2013]), 1-28.

[227] For more on the *radīf* and the rhyme letter (*rāwī*), see L.P. Elwell-Sutton, "*ʿArūż*," *EIr*, II/6-7, 670-679. http://www.iranicaonline.org/articles/aruz-the-metrical-system.

[228] "*Tarṣīʿ* is a stylistic feature of a word combination based on the principle of equivalence of sound. It is attested in Arabic literature from the earliest stages and can be found in Ḳurʾān, *Ḥadīth*, poetry, and prose. A figure of style explicitly called *tarṣīʿ* was described for the first time, as far as we know, by Ḳudāma b. Djaʿfar […], who only requires agreement in metre or rhyme and who allows assonance instead of pure rhyme […]." G. Schoeler, "*Tarṣīʿ*," *EI2*. http://dx.doi.org/10.1163/1573-3912_islam_COM_1186. Magdi Wahba defines the English equivalent of *al-tarṣīʿ* (also called *al-sajʿ al-mutawāzī*) as 'isocolon,' or "structuring the parts of a sentence, or paragraph, so as to balance each part in accordance with length, number of parts, and words. This very much resembles what is called *al-tarṣīʿ*." My translation of the given Arabic definition. "*Isocolon*," Magdi Wahba, *A Dictionary of Literary Terms (English, French, Arabic)* (Beirut: Librairie du Liban, 1974), 263-264. See also "*Isocolon*," *The New Princeton Encyclopedia of Poetry and Poetics*. http://gateway.proquest.com/openurl?ctx_ver=Z39.88-2003&xri:pqil:res_ver=0.2&res_id=xri:lion&rft_id=xri:lion:ft:ref:R00793756:0. The word *tarṣīʿ* literally means "embellishing with jewels or gold." For more on its use in the Persian tradition, see N. Chalisova, "*Rhetorical Figures*," *EIr*. http://www.iranicaonline.org/articles/rhetorical-figures.

the poem and move the scene from the Phoenix's song and preparation for the imminent fire to the actual immolation. In line 38, though the fire is not yet lit, we learn that the spot the Phoenix is in has been "glorified by fire" already. The Persian past participle *yāftah* indicates that the *tajlīl* (glorifying or exaltation) has happened there before, thus representing the continual repetition of the Phoenix's cycle of life and death. *Tajlīl* also has to do with the Divine, as in the Arabic phrase *ʿazza wa-jalla* (the Mighty and Glorified). The holy fire (*ātash*) of line 38 is doubly antithetical[229] to the hell (*jahannam*) of line 39. In line 38, the fire is related to divine glorification and is a Persian word; in line 39, the place transforms into a hell, and *jahannam* is an Arabic loan-word. I do not mean to suggest that Nīmā harbors any ill-will towards the Arabs. I merely want to bring out the variety of ways in which the two lines work together to demonstrate how this critical moment in the poem functions rhetorically. In fact, *ātash* and *jahannam* are further differentiated by their respective functions in Zoroastrianism and Islam, and the poem plays on their contrasting symbolism. Whereas *jahannam*'s fire is an eternal punishment, the Zoroastrian *ātash* purifies with its ashes[230] and is related to the old Iranian divinity Ahura Mazda.[231] The combination of formal parallelism with the rhetorically-charged opposition in religious meaning between the lines marks their transitional nature.

The first part of the final stanza reads,

That mellifluous bird (*ān murgh-i naghz-khvān*)
in that place glorified by fire— (*bar ān makān za ātash-i tajlīl yāftah*)
now turned into a hell— (*aknūn bih yak jahannam tabdīl yāftah*)

[229] The Persian critical tradition calls antithesis *taḍād* (*tażād*) or follows the Arab use of the term *ṭibāq*. W.P. Heinrichs, "*Ṭibāḳ*," *EI2*. http://dx.doi.org/10.1163/1573-3912_islam_COM_1215.

[230] "The hearth fire, providing warmth, light and comfort, was regarded by the ancient Iranians as the embodiment of the divinity Ātar, who lived among men as their servant and master." M. Boyce, "Ātaš," *EIr*, III/1, 1-5; http://www.iranicaonline.org/articles/atas-fire.

[231] M. Boyce, "Ahura Mazdā," *EIr*, I/7, 684-687; http://www.iranicaonline.org/articles/ahura-mazda.

keeps blinking, his sharp eyes, (*bast-ast dambidam naẓar u mīdahad tikān*)
darting around, (*chashmān-i tīzbīn*)[232]
and from over the hill,
suddenly, he unfurls and flaps his wings
from the depths of his heart he lets out a cry, burning and bitter,
its meaning unknown to other passing birds.

Nearing its end, the poem lingers on the miseries forcing the Phoenix toward its death. After years of suffering and pain, he cries out "from the depths of its heart," but once more the other birds do not understand the meaning of his cry. Considering the metapoetic thrust of the poem introduced in the first stanza's juxtaposition of meter and meaning, the end of the poem continues to elaborate on the conceit of poet-as-phoenix. The poet, like the Phoenix in the poem, suffers, and the poem itself stands in for the Phoenix's mournful cry. Again, "*Quqnūs*'s" intertextual connection to ʿAṭṭār's poem brings out the close links between the Phoenix and the poet, who both live on after their death in what they create out of their pain. "What other creature can—throughout the earth— / After death takes him, to himself give birth?" ʿAṭṭār asks.[233]

The final stanza of *Quqnūs* ties together a number of other premodern Persian poetic themes beyond its obvious reference to ʿAṭṭār in yet another demonstration of how Nīmā goes about structuring his conception of modernist poetry. The interconnection of heaven and hell in lines 38 and 39 also represents a return to the Persian mystical tradition, which in turn hearkens back to the beginnings of Islamic mysticism and the famous Manṣūr al-Ḥallāj. We find faint traces of al-Ḥallāj's passion[234] in "*Quqnūs*." While Nīmā's innovative development of Arabic

[232] I have changed the order of the words in the original Persian when translating this line and the one before it.

[233] Trans. Darbandi and Davis, http://www.laphamsquarterly.org/magic-shows/ashes. ʿAṭṭār, *Manṭiq al-ṭayr*, 154.

[234] I am following Louis Massignon's use of the term in the title of his wide-ranging study of al-Ḥallāj: *La Passion de Husayn Ibn Mansûr Hallâj: martyr mystique de l'Islam, exécuté à Bagdad le 26 mars 922: étude d'histoire religieuse* ([Paris]: Gallimard, 1975 [1922]); *The passion of al-Hallāj: mystic and martyr of Islam*, with a Foreword by Herbert Mason trans., 4 Vols. (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1982).

prosody represents the transnational keystone in the modernist edifice he constructs for the poem's form, his subtle references to the Sufi tradition, and particularly al-Ḥallāj, do the same in its content.

As the Phoenix prepares for death, he sits steadfast on his funeral pyre, looking out at the surrounding birds who do not understand the meaning behind his swan song. The scene reminds us of al-Ḥallāj's execution in 922 CE by the order of the Abbasid Caliphate. The range of connections between Nīmā's Phoenix and the Sufi master is quite broad, but it will suffice here to mention only a few of the links between the two in order to further elaborate how intertextuality operates in the background of "*Quqnūs'*s" content. First of all, ʿAṭṭār's Phoenix looms large as Nīmā's primary reference, and it was ʿAṭṭār who popularized al-Ḥallāj in the Sufi tradition when he "included a relatively long biography of [al-Ḥallāj] at pride of place, the very climax, of his *Tadkerat al-awliāʾ* [*Biographies of the Saints*]." Additionally, ʿAṭṭār's account "contains motifs that would become associated closely with Ḥallāj in Persian poetry, such as fearless self-sacrifice, eagerness to ascend the gibbet and die in order to return to God, and celebration at his own bleeding and the approach of death."[235] Furthermore, al-Ḥallāj also proved a popular figure among the Arab Tammūzī (that is, Adonisian) poets, including al-Bayātī, Adūnīs, and Ṣalāḥ ʿAbd al-Ṣabūr. As an Arabic-speaking native of the Persian Fārs province, al-Ḥallāj's transnational presence in Arabic and Persian modernism is deserving of a more thorough investigation than I have space for here. Specifically for my analysis of "*Quqnūs,*" al-Ḥallāj's inversion of Islamic ritual and belief resonates with Nīmā's mixing of boundaries, especially the

[235] Jawid Mojaddedi, "Ḥallāj," *EIr*, XI/6, 589-592; http://www.iranicaonline.org/articles/hallaj-1. For ʿAṭṭār's entry on al-Ḥallāj, see *Tadhkiratu 'l-awliya ("Memoirs of the Saints") of Muḥammad ibn Ibrahim Faridu'd-Din ʿAṭṭar*, Reynold A. Nicholson ed., Part II, Persian Historical Texts, Vol. V (London: Luzac & Co., 1907), 135-145.

reversals of heaven and hell in lines 38 and 39, as "Ḥallāj is also renowned for having identified closely with and glorified Satan."[236] The end of the last stanza closely parallels al-Ḥallāj's execution on the gibbet, the burning of his corpse, and the collection of his ashes, which in turn possessed magical properties.[237]

Purification through immolation and unification with the Divine is perhaps the most salient theme linking ʿAṭṭār's entry on al-Ḥallāj to the Sufi tradition. This theme is also central to the structure of meaning in Nīmā's poetry, extending beyond "*Quqnūs*" to "The Bird of Grief," which I discuss in the next section. The same theme is famously found in the story of the moth and the flame, canonized in ʿAṭṭār's *Manṭiq al-ṭayr*.[238] Schimmel gives an account of al-Ḥallāj's take on the motif.

> Ḥallāj describes the fate of the moth that approaches the flame and eventually gets burned in it, thus realizing the Reality of Realities. He does not want the light or the heat but casts himself into the flame, never to return and never to give any information about the Reality, for he has reached perfection. Whoever has read Persian poetry knows that the poets choose this story of the moth and the candle as one of their favorite allegories to express the fate of the true lover.[239]

Although the motif of candle and moth can be traced throughout the mystical poetic tradition in Persian, Schimmel notes that the "classic quotation in the Persian lyric tradition is probably Ḥāfiẓ's verse:

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[236] Mojaddedi, "Ḥallāj." Mojaddedi adds that "[al-Ḥallāj] depicts Satan as the most sincere and uncompromising of monotheists for refusing to bow in obeisance to anyone but God, even when ordered by Him to do so before Adam with the threat that he would be cursed as punishment for disobedience."

[237] Cf. Mojaddedi, "Ḥallāj" and Massignon, *The Passion of al-Hallāj*, Vol. I, *The Life of al-Hallāj*, 622-624.

[238] ʿAṭṭār, *Manṭiq al-ṭayr*, 258-259.

[239] Annemarie Schimmel, *Mystical Dimensions of Islam* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1978), 70. See also Mahmoud Omidsalar and J. T. P. de Bruijn, "Candle," *EIr*, IV/7, 748-751; http://www.iranicaonline.org/articles/candle-pers: "[W]hen the candle represents the beloved, then the lover is the moth (*parvāna*), which cannot resist the light and is drawn into the flame and consumed."

Fire is not that about whose flame the candle laughs—
fire is what is thrown into the moth's harvest!"[240]

The Phoenix's dirge in "*Quqnūs*" also echoes this line of Ḥāfiẓ, and we can tease out more threads binding Nīmā's poem to the premodern Persian poetic tradition by comparing their vocabulary. Ḥāfīẓ's line is, "*ātash ān nīst kih bar shuʿlah-'i ū khandad shamʿ // ātash ān ast kih dar kharman-i parvānah zadand*".[241] When we retrace our steps to an earlier point in "*Quqnūs*," we find in lines 30-32, "their dreams / are like a harvest of fire / sparkling in the eye" ("*Umīdishān* / *chūn kharmanī zi ātash* / *dar chashm mīnamāyad*"). The word "harvest" (*kharman*) recalls Ḥāfiẓ's verses, especially once we consider how the poem continually reaches back to earlier poetry for inspiration. In Ḥāfīẓ's line, the moth's harvest is fire, a metaphor for the mystical annihilation of the self in the Divine. "*Quqnūs*" depends on this same theme. The other birds only dream about the "harvest of fire" that "sparkles in their eyes." The Phoenix's funeral pyre, around which the other birds have gathered, will eventually burst into flames; the Phoenix's "harvest of fire" will only be reflected in their eyes.

This image of the Phoenix in flames surrounded by the other onlooking birds represents yet another shift in the perspective of the poem. While the Phoenix initially bore witness to the poetic past by composing his song from "a thousand different voices," the other birds now stop the flow of their passing lives to observe the Phoenix's end. By turning the other birds into witnesses in these final lines, the poem's conclusion suggests the possibility of their becoming conscious of the Phoenix's "invisible pain" (*ranj-hā-yi darūnash*). We must then read the final line as indicating not the rebirth of the Phoenix but rather the transfer of the Phoenix's burdens to

[240] Schimmel, *A Two-Colored Brocade*, 198. Translation modified.

[241] Line 6 of *ghazal* 174. *Sharḥ-i ghazaliyyāt-i Ḥāfiẓ*, Bihrūz Sarvatiyyān, Daftar-i Duvum (Tihrān: Pūyandagān-i Dānishgāh, 1380 [2001]), 1867.

the birds in his audience. Again, by mirroring the martyrdom of al-Ḥallāj, "*Quqnūs*" sets itself up to function in the way that al-Ḥallāj's willingness to die for his beliefs inspired generations of Sufis who kept his story alive. Al-Ḥallāj's famous phrase summing up his total devotion to God had such a pronounced effect that it even inspired Louis Massignon to embark on his encyclopedic study of him[242] and ended up in the title of Reuven Snir's book on ʿAbd al-Wahhāb al-Bayātī.[243] "*Rakʿatān fī al-ʿishq*," responded al-Ḥallāj when asked why he wiped blood on his face following the amputation of his hands, "*lā yaṣiḥḥ wuḍūʾuhumā illā bi-l-dam*." ("Two series of prostrations suffice in love, but their ablution must be performed with blood.")[244] The Phoenix's unwavering stare out of the fire parallels al-Ḥallāj's lack of fear at the moment of his death due to his ultimate faith in his everlasting existence in the Divine.

Metapoetically, the last line might then be understood to be gesturing to the reader as witness to the poet's pain just like many of al-Ḥallāj's disciples witnessed his execution. The reader, then, is left to carry out the project the poem lays the foundation for: a radically open modernity that operates in dialogue with Persian cultural patrimony. Because of its radical openness, this modernity is untethered to any specific teleology of what modernity ought to be. (Later studies might productively approach Nīmā's poetry in relation to politics with this as a starting point, for this is how his modernist aesthetic vision opposes the administrative modernity of the contemporary Iranian political sphere. The intertextual connection between the Phoenix's

[242] See Patrick Laude, *Pathways to an Inner Islam: Massignon, Corbin, Guenon, and Schuon* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 2010), 187.

[243] Ruʾūbīn Sanīr [Reuven Snir], *Rak'atān fī al-'ishq: dirāsah fī shi'r 'Abd al-Wahhāb al-Bayātī* (Bayrūt: Dār al-Sāqī, 2002).

[244] ʿAṭṭār, *Tadhkirah*, 144. Translation is modified from Laude, *Pathways to an Inner Islam*, 187.

end and al-Ḥallāj's execution at the hands of the Abbasid regime might prove a productive site of analysis for those inclined to political readings of Nīmā's poetry.)

The poem ends by challenging its audience.

> Then, drunk from his invisible pain (*ranj-hā-yi darūnash*),
> [the Phoenix] throws himself on the awesome fire.
> A violent wind blows, and the bird is burned up.[245]
> The ashes of his body are collected up,[246]
> his chicks take flight from the heart of his ashes.

In the end the poet-phoenix's immeasurable pain erupts in his own destruction. "[D]runk from his invisible pains, / he throws himself on the awesome fire. / A violent wind blows, and the bird is burned up." But in the final two lines, Nīmā breaks away from ʿAṭṭār's version (and other familiar stories of the Phoenix), for usually only a single new Phoenix rises out of the ashes. Instead, in "*Quqnūs*" "the ashes of [the Phoenix's] body are collected up, / his *chicks* (*jūjah-hā-sh*) take flight from the heart of his ashes." The difference with ʿAṭṭār's poem is striking, leaving the reader to draw particular conclusions about Nīmā's decision to use a plural. Considering that "*Quqnūs*" comes early in Nīmā's development of metrical form, the final line represents his hope that other poets might later continue the innovations he was making in Persian poetry. The metapoetic thrust of these final lines is primed by the immediately preceding image of the other passing birds turning their full attention to the Phoenix and reflecting his immolation in their eyes. Yet again, the poem collapses categories together in a blatant challenge

[245] In Nīmā's *Majmūʿah* there is a question mark at the end of this line, which, for example, Dabashi retains in his translation: "Has the bird burnt?" ("Nima Yushij," 165). Although I have been unable to find a copy of the version published in *Majallah-'i musīqī*, I am inclined to agree with Amr Ahmed's decision—following the opinion of Sīrūs Shamīsā—to omit it as an error in the Ṭahbāz edition. *La «Révolution littéraire»*, 426.

[246] Lines 48 and 49 are closely linked due to the presence of a *radīf* ("*ast murgh*"), which I have attempted to mirror in my English translation by repeating the word "up" with the preceding consonance of "b's" and "c's" in place of the Persian rhyme "*ūkht*." The Persian is, "*bād-i shadīd mīdamad u sūkht-ast murgh / khākistar-i tan-ash-rā andūkht-ast murgh*".

to administrative modernity, transferring the revolutionary perspective of the Phoenix into the eyes of the other birds, which we might also understand the chicks in the final line to symbolically represent. Their challenge, then, is to succeed where the Phoenix fails: to break out of the cycle's repeated teleology and create something truly new.

Overall, "*Quqnūs*" embodies the first instance of Nīmā's combination of a type of symbolism unprecedented in the Persian tradition with his innovative take on premodern metrical patterns. The poem is the imaginary edifice that provides the basis for the modernist Persian poetry to follow. It marks a turning point in Nīmā's career, for his later poetry would continue to push the boundaries he first tested in it, especially with its meter. But as I have shown above, the Arabic *ʿarūḍ* continues to metrically ground the poem, despite Nīmā's move to change the number of feet per line. This change allowed Nīmā to create the metapoetic perspective that defines the poem with the dissonance between form and content in the first stanza. He builds while he breaks, thus revealing his modernist vision to his readers and charting the course for the directions his poetry would later take off in.

Other Examples of Nīmāic Prosody and Symbolism: Building on the Past, Not Breaking Away

The experimental use of metrics found in *Quqnūs* extends to other poems Nīmā wrote during the same period. I offer two more examples of poems written in the Nīmāic style: that is, poems that have a varied number of feet per line but are nonetheless in conformity with premodern *ʿarūż*. These examples, "*Ghurāb"* ("The Raven") and "*Murgh-i gham*" ("The Bird of Grief"), also offer further evidence of Nīmā's modernist poetic vision, specifically the foundational role he saw his poetry playing in spurring on the changes he hoped for in future Persian poetry. In addition to showing how the metrical basis of these two poems connects to the

premodern Persian prosodic tradition, I also extend my critical analysis of Nīmā's conception of modernity to the symbols used in them in a continuation of my discussion of al-Ḥallāj's presence in "*Quqnūs*." I underline some more of the foundational elements of Nīmā's poetry in order to anchor my overall discussion of Persian and Arabic modernism by pointing out the features they share.

"*Ghurāb*" ("The Raven"), from 1938, is based on an octameter *muḍāriʿ* meter, with a varying number of feet per line. The standard form of a hemistich in the Khalīlian system is: *fāʿīlu fāʿilātu mafāʿīlu fāʿilātun*, or ¯ ¯ ˘ / ¯ ˘ ¯ ˘ / ˘ ¯ ¯ ˘ / ¯ ˘ ¯ ¯. Using these feet to represent the first stanza, it looks like this, with missing feet (or parts of feet) crossed through:

fāʿīlu fāʿilātu mafāʿīlu fāʿilātun	¯ ¯ ˘ / ¯ ˘ ¯ ˘ / ˘ ¯ ¯ ˘ / ¯ ˘ ¯ ¯
fāʿīlu fāʿilātu mafāʿīlu fāʿilātun	¯ ¯ ˘ / ¯ ˘ ¯ ˘ / ˘ ¯ ¯ ˘ / ¯ ˘ ¯ ¯
fāʿīlu fāʿilātu mafāʿīlu fāʿilātun	¯ ¯ ˘ / ¯ ˘ ¯ ˘ / ˘ ¯ ¯ ˘ / ¯ ˘ ¯ ¯
fāʿīlu fāʿilātu mafāʿīlu fāʿilātun	¯ ¯ ˘ / ¯ ˘ ¯
fāʿīlu fāʿilātu mafāʿīlu fāʿilātun	¯ ¯ ˘ / ¯ ˘ ¯ ˘ / ˘ ¯ ¯ ˘ / ¯ ˘ ¯ ¯
fāʿīlu fāʿilātu mafāʿīlu fāʿilātun	¯ ¯ ˘ / ¯
fāʿīlu fāʿilātu mafāʿīlu fāʿilātun	¯ ¯ ˘ / ¯ ˘ ¯ ˘ / ˘ ¯ ¯ ˘ / ¯ ˘ ¯ ¯
fāʿīlu fāʿilātu mafāʿīlu fāʿilātun	¯ ¯ ˘ / ¯ ˘ ¯ ˘
fāʿīlu fāʿilātu mafāʿīlu fāʿilātun	¯ ¯ ˘ / ¯ ˘ ¯ ˘ / ˘ ¯
fāʿīlu fāʿilātu mafāʿīlu fāʿilātun	¯ ¯ ˘ / ¯ ˘ ¯ ˘ / ˘ ¯
fāʿīlu fāʿilātu mafāʿīlu fāʿilātun	¯ ¯ ˘ / ¯ ˘ ¯ ˘ / ˘ ¯ ¯ ˘ / ¯ ˘ ¯ ¯
fāʿīlu fāʿilātu mafāʿīlu fāʿilātun	¯ ¯ ˘ / ¯ ˘ ¯ ˘ / ˘ ¯ ¯ ˘ / ¯ ˘ ¯ ¯

This is a poetic translation of the entire poem. In the following analysis, I place this poem in relation to Nīmā's other work from the same period.

> At dusk, from the mountain peaks, the sun's
> sorrow is veiled in yellow colors,
> alone at the edge of the shore a raven sits.
> From far away the waters
> start to match the sky and an oak's face—
> yellowed by autumn—
> turns into a shelf of rock about to fall.
> From those far-off points,
> a black dot appears,
> a man on a path, perhaps,
> seeking a secluded corner away from others' eyes

so as to not betray the sorrow (*gham*) his heart hides.

Once he finds a hiding place that suits him,
the raven's piercing eyes emerge from the flood of waves,
pinned on him, unwavering.
What comes of those people (*k-az ān guz̲argahān*)
passing by, joy or agony?
Something just like everything that he has already seen
There's a line in his eyes, drawn to the path
far away, foundations smolder (*bunyād-hā-yi sūkhtah az dūr*)
a cloud floats over the abandoned horizon.

At that very moment, each looks toward the other
staring at each other across the distance
this, the form of a raven and blackness, (*īn shakl-i yak ghurāb va siyāhī*)
and to the man, whatever you might think,
that raven, ugly, seems to be the source of sorrow.
His is a sorrowful tale, heaven's bandit.
Sitting still until, through sorrow, the sorrow that he feeds,
he reaches sorrow's threshold in his fantasies.
With this sorrow, he flings open a door for creation,
then turns those thoughts' abode into desolation.
From far away, a cry rises to his lips, "O Raven!"
But the raven,
free of this world,
just stares at him,
coldly sitting, motionless, where he had been
as those gloomy waves crash and retreat.
Something's hidden underneath…
something they chew up.

"The Raven's" setting is similar to that of "*Quqnūs*": the bleak countryside features an ongoing conflict between light and dark at sundown. Once again, a lonely figure appears in the darkness ("a man on a path"), a character that shares much in common with the peasant from before. From "a secluded corner away from others' eyes," this man ponders the situation of the rest of mankind. "What comes of those people / passing by, joy or agony?" Again, the passers-by (*guz̲argahān*) represent the uninitiated, those who do not contemplate the mysteries of existence. The man, on the other hand, faces head-on the darkness the raven symbolizes.

The man, not the title bird, occupies the position of the poet in "The Raven." Here, the man's experience of sorrow or grief (*gham*) generates his creative material. The poem specifically recognizes the link between sorrow and creativity in its third stanza. Drawing on the surrounding sadness, symbolized in the blackness of the raven (*īn shakl-i yak ghurāb va siyāhī*), he remains motionless "until, through sorrow, the sorrow that he feeds, / he reaches sorrow's threshold in his fantasies. / With this sorrow, he flings open a door for creation, / then turns those thoughts' abode into desolation." Once more, the poet builds and destroys almost simultaneously, drawing on his sorrow before laying his thoughts low and sweeping them away.

The central theme of "The Raven" is the productive creative power of pain, the primary source of Nīmā's poetics. He acknowledged pain's important place in his poetry in the comments he made to the Writer's Congress, telling his audience,

> The primary essence of my poetry is pain (*ranj*). I believe that the actual speaker ought to have experienced that essence. I recite poetry about my own pain and that of others. Myself, words, meter, and rhyme have been at all times tools (*abzār-hā*) I have been compelled to change so as to better correspond to my pain and that of others (*kih majbūr bi-ʿavaż kardan-i ān-hā būdah-am tā bā ranj-i man va dīgarān bihtar sāzgār bāshad*).[247]

Once more, Nīmā couches his explanation of his process in the language of craft, here explaining how he uses the tools of his poetic craft to express not only his own pain, but also that of others. The essential link between his poetic craft and society is always a primary consideration in Nīmā's thought,[248] and the man in "The Raven" creates something out of his and others' sorrows the way Nīmā composes poetry to reflect their pain.

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[247] *Nakhustīn kungirah*, 64.

[248] "You should not be something that is not part of the collective (*shumā nabāyad chīzī bāshīd kih dar jamʿ nīst*)." *Ḥarf-hā-yi hamsāyah*, 44; *The Neighbor Says*, 53.

"*Murgh-i gham*" ("The Bird of Grief"), also from 1938, develops on the same theme, although this time the poetic persona speaks in the first person as if from the perspective of the man in "The Raven." The poem is based on an octameter *ramal* (running) meter,[249] with a varied number of feet in each line. In a single hemistich, its Khalīlian feet are: *fāʿilātun fāʿilātun fāʿilātun fāʿilā*, or ¯ ˘ ¯ ¯ / ¯ ˘ ¯ ¯ / ¯ ˘ ¯ ¯ / ¯ ˘ ¯. Its first two stanzas represented metrically with missing feet struck through are:

fāʿilātun fāʿilātun fāʿilātun fāʿilā	¯ ˘ ¯ ¯ / ¯ ˘ ¯ ¯ / ¯ ˘ ¯ ¯ / ¯ ˘ ¯
fāʿilātun fāʿilātun fāʿilātun fāʿilā	¯ ˘ ¯ ¯ / ¯ ˘ ¯ ¯ / ¯ ˘ ¯ ¯ / ¯ ˘ ¯
fāʿilātun fāʿilātun fāʿilātun fāʿilā	¯ ˘ ¯ ¯ / ¯ ˘ ¯ ¯ / ¯ ˘ ¯ ¯ / ¯ ˘ ¯
fāʿilātun fāʿilā~~tun fāʿilātun fāʿilā~~	¯ ˘ ¯ ¯ / ¯ ˘ ¯
fāʿilātun fāʿilā~~tun fāʿilātun fāʿilā~~	¯ ˘ ¯ ¯ / ¯ ˘ ¯
fāʿilātun fāʿilā~~tun fāʿilātun fāʿilā~~	¯ ˘ ¯ ¯ / ¯ ˘ ¯
fāʿilātun fāʿilā~~tun fāʿilātun fāʿilā~~	¯ ˘ ¯ ¯ / ¯ ˘ ¯

Once again, I give a poetic rendering of the entirety of "The Bird of Grief" in English, followed by brief comments.

Up on this wall of grief, like smoke rising,
a bird constantly sits, wings spread,
overcome by thoughts of grief, he can't help but shake his head

Talons burnt up below
with ashes underneath (*zīr-i khākistar firū*)
though he used to laugh, now
his foundation is grief (*līk gham bunyād-i ū*)

He perches wherever there's a branch, dejected
passers-by (*rahguzar*) hear the voice of this gloomy bird
in the dawn darkness, sitting steadfast,

He bears the songs of all his grief about this world
telling of his grieving heart in this ruin,

[249] Thiesen comments on this meter's central place in the premodern Persian tradition. "In the oldest period this *vazn* is not too commonly met with, but its popularity increases steadily throughout the classical period until in the post-classical period it has become the most common of all *ouzān* employed in *qazaliāt* and *qasā'ed*. Roughly one sixth (!) of all *qasā'ed* are written in *bahr e ramal e mosamman e mahzūf*." *A Manual of Classical Persian Prosody*, 127. Exclamation point added. See also Wright, *A Grammar of the Arabic Language*, Vol. 2, 366.

at times he cannot move, his wings are in such pain.

No one has ever seen him or knows exactly what he is
up on those ruined walls, who is it that calls?
Could any other bird live this way?

Every moment, this embodied grief lets out a mournful sigh (*mīkashad īn haykal-i gham az ghamī har laḥẓah āh*)
He stares into the darkness of my gaze,
searching for me on the path in that dark air.

I burn with sighing every second in this ruin
cornered, stuck in my own trap without bait, there I am.
What candle? What moth? Each candle, each moth is me!

I'm lost within these rotten walls
hand and foot placed over a line black as night,
I strike out with hand and foot like someone voiceless, half alive.

Then, on this wall of grief, all pressed together,
I draw images of grief above and below
grief paints every moment, and I also paint my grief.

So no one will see us,
I separate night's dark,
that rests deep in the heart,
out of my own color.

We talk with each other about waiting for morning.
We weave a cocoon of yellowed dust over ourselves.
We do things. I with my hand, and he crying out.

"The Bird of Grief" continues a number of the same themes found in "*Quqnūs*." The title bird's "foundation is grief" ("*gham bunyād-i ū*") while its sorrow and pain define it to such an extent that it even embodies grief itself ("*īn haykal-i gham*"). After switching into the first-person account in line 19, the speaker turns to the Islamic mystical tradition, linking this poem to the theoretical metaphysics initiated by al-Ḥallāj on the gibbet. "I burn with sighing every second in this ruin / cornered, stuck in my own trap without bait, there I am. / What candle? What moth? Each candle, each moth is me!" The poetic self recognizes the interconnection of all existence,

collapsing together the symbols of lover and beloved: moth and candle, Sufi seeker and the Divine. Later, however, the reader finds that this collapse of categories is mediated by grief in this poem, just like in "The Raven." (*Gham* being the Persian word I have variously translated as both "grief" and "sorrow.") The speaker's being emerges out of a grief he creates. "Grief paints every moment, and I also paint my grief."

The centrality of pain and grief reminds us once more of al-Ḥallāj's passion. When Nīmā writes, "So no one will see us, / I separate night's dark, / that rests deep in the heart / out of my own color," he not only gestures to darkness, pain, and sadness as sources for creation but also to al-Ḥallāj's ablutions made in blood. The centrality of pain in the poetic creative process mirrors the productive role pain had in al-Ḥallāj's demonstration of total faith in God.

Finally, night—not day!—plays host to the creation that takes place in "The Bird of Grief." The speaker "separates night's darkness" out of his "own color" to extend it. In the last stanza, the poem explains why. "We talk with each other about waiting for morning. / We weave a cocoon of yellowed dust over ourselves. / We do things. I with my hand, and he crying out." Under cover of night, the speaker carries on a conversation with the bird of grief as Nīmā creates a discourse with pain, darkness, and grief in the poem. In anticipation of the dawn, the poem's speaker "does things" along with the bird (*chīz-hā-yī mīkunīm*). Yet again, the poem presents a metaperspective on the act of writing poetry, for the speaker and the poet here become one and the same. While the bird cries out, the speaker composes the poem.

"The Raven" and "The Bird of Grief" provide two additional examples of Nīmā's continued reliance on the Arabic *ʿarūḍ* system during the early years of Persian New Poetry. Like in "The Phoenix" before them, their primary innovation comes from the poet's ability to shorten or lengthen a line by adding or subtracting poetic feet (or parts of feet) within each line.

Furthermore, these two poems also represent an extension of the themes and subjects Nīmā had been working with ever since the publication of "The Swan" in 1926. Specifically, they hearken back to the Islamic (and pre-Islamic) cultural past, engaging with it in an open and productive way to preserve "the tattered shreds of a thousand distant voices." Finally, Nīmā's subtle references to al-Ḥallāj connect his modernist poetic vision to that of the modernists who would be active in the Arab world in the coming years.

Conclusion: Nīmā and the Transnational Resonances of Arabic in Persian Modernist Poetry

I begin my readings of Near Eastern modernist poetry with Nīmā's work because his conception of modernism is directly tied up with the idea of poetry as craft and thus allows us to explore how poets use the tools available to them. Because Nīmā takes recourse in the language of building: *sākhtimān*, *banā*, *mīsāzam*, *bunyād*, *abzār*, etc., I look to the structural elements of his approach to composing modernist poetry, beginning with his formal basis in premodern Arabic metrics. Nīmā's use of premodern prosodic patterns and his ingenious reformulation of the elements making up the poetic line represent the first instance of transnational movement between the Arabic and Persian modernist traditions, as Persian prosody was (and is still, to a huge extent) anchored in the science of prosody al-Khalīl invented many centuries ago in Basra. I turn to the technicalities of Nīmā's metrical innovations during the early years of his modernist experiments to lay the foundation for my later discussion of the persistence of premodern prosodic patterns in both Arabic and Persian modernist poetry. While Nīmā's use of symbolism represents a revolutionary change in the history of Persian poetry, the changes he brought to prosody ought to be understood not in opposition to earlier verse forms but rather by way of their close connections to the Arabic poetry of the Iraqi modernists.

The hidden meanings of Nīmā's poem "*Quqnūs*" only begin to materialize when the reader considers the interrelationship of form and content within it. Building on the dissonance of form and content found in the poem's first stanza, Nīmā goes on to present a metrical and symbolic model for modernist Persian poetry in the rest of the poem. Further developing the metapoetic perspective found in his earlier poem "*Qū*," in which the title swan stood in for the poet, Nīmā puts the Phoenix in place of the poet as well. In addition to the foundational elements of traditional prosody upon which "*Quqnūs*" relies, the poem's content remains closely linked to the premodern Persian poetic tradition through its intertextual connections to, most directly, ʿAṭṭār's *Manṭiq al-ṭayr*. Nīmā's reference to ʿAṭṭār begins a series of associations with the mystical tradition of Islam, reaching all the way back to one of its most prominent figures, al-Ḥallāj, whose traces we find in Nīmā's other poems and criticism from the same period. The movement backwards in time that Nīmā's approach to composing New Poetry suggests provides a solid traditional genealogy for a poetic process many scholars have considered to be founded on a total break with the past. The way Nīmā engages with the Islamic and pre-Islamic Iranian past contrasts sharply with contemporaneous Pahlavi cultural projects, which the regime used to create the fabricated nationalist history it employed in fashioning its strict conception of modern citizenship. Nīmā's poetry extends beyond these nationalist limits in its vision, though unfortunately it has for the most part not yet exceeded the bounds of a Persian-speaking milieu in terms of reception or translation.[250]

In conclusion, I argue that Nīmā's modernist poetry—which is open to the past and therefore attuned to the realities of history that came before it—is a continuation of a long

[250] My translations of the four poems discussed at length in this chapter appear in Volume 7 of the *Inventory* translation journal, Princeton (Winter, 2017): 66-74.

tradition defined by prolonged interaction between Persian and Arab cultures. In this chapter, the transnational interconnection of Arabic poetry and Persian poetry manifests in Nīmā's continued reliance on the Arabic *ʿarūḍ* and its history of reception in Persian prosody. The changes Nīmā initiated would continue in the work of later poets like Aḥmad Shāmlū and Furūgh Farrukhzād, among many others. Nīmā was willing to engage his poetic predecessors on their own terms and refused to allow his poetry to become subject to the realities of the Pahlavi national project. Rather than bowing to an externally constructed reality, Nīmā describes his alternative, self-reflexive attitude of modernity and where such an attitude might fit in mid-twentieth century Iran. This is the point at which his poetry bleeds into the political sphere, and later studies would benefit from taking this idea as their starting point. By avoiding specifically nationalist narratives in favor of incorporating elements from both European poetry and the Islamic mystical tradition, Nīmā looks beyond the borders of modern Iran. Finally, Nīmā's continued reliance on received Arabic prosodic patterns constitutes a significant instance of transnational, lateral exchange that took place beyond the bounds of colonial interference and Western poetic influence. In the end, Nīmā's modernist innovations in Persian poetry retain many elements of a Near Eastern cultural heritage that it shared with Arabic poetic modernism, as we will see in the coming chapters.

Chapter Three

Badr Shākir al-Sayyāb's Transnational Turn

Peace to the whole wide world
Peace to the Ganges, overflowing with blessings

Peace to China, the farmers,
And tanned fishermen,
The blood of revolutionaries planted in the ground,
Shining from the red flag

Peace to the whole wide world
To east and west alike,
Peace to Avon, which filled the veins
Of Shakespeare, the flowers, and the waterwheel

Peace to the Paris of Robespierre,
Éluard and the surreal

To Tunisia, where a shadow circles a burning flame,
And around bloodied Rabat, there is a roar.

Glory is yours, O Asia!
Peace to Venice and the Carnival.[251]

Although best known as a pioneer of free verse in Arabic, the famed Iraqi poet Badr Shākir al-Sayyāb (1926-1964) was also, earlier in his career, deeply involved with the Iraqi Communist Party (ICP) and the *Anṣār al-salām* (The Peace Partisans), a pacifist group connected to the Soviet-backed "Ban the Bomb" movement that began in March 1950. The Peace Partisans had a significant presence in Iraq, and as a young Communist, al-Sayyāb wrote poetry in support of the group's global pacifist agenda.[252] The above lines from al-Sayyāb's 1954 long poem "*al-Asliḥah wa-l-aṭfāl*" ("Weapons and Children"),[253] for example, evince this poetics of worldwide

[251] Badr Shākir al-Sayyāb, a*l-Aʿmāl al-shiʿriyyah al-kāmilah*, 4th ed. (Baghdād: Dār al-Ḥurriyah li-l-Ṭibāʿah wa-l-Nashr, 2008), excerpts from 307-310. All translations from the Arabic are mine.

[252] Including the 122-line poem "*Fajr al-salām*" ("Dawn of Peace") from 1950. For a brief discussion of the poetry al-Sayyāb wrote for the Peace Partisans, see Terri DeYoung, *Placing the Poet*, 223.

[253] I use the version found in al-Sayyāb, *al-Aʿmāl al-shiʿriyyah al-kāmilah*, 296-310.

pacifism. Their calls for peace in areas as geographically and historically dispersed as Shakespeare's Avon, Robespierre's Paris, Tunisia, Venice, and China render the global imaginary of Communist internationalism in meter and rhyme.

Yet the above lines only represent a small fragment of "Weapons and Children's" broader poetics. A fuller consideration of the poem reveals how its setting in the Iraqi countryside works in tension with its vision for an international, Communist, peaceful future. Indeed, the poem's reliance on Iraqi-specific language, imagery, and symbolism—the waterwheel (*nāʿūrah*), the marsh Arabs' *muḍīf* dwellings made of *qaṣab* reeds, and gods from ancient Near Eastern mythology—celebrates the local as much as it glorifies the global, the national as much as the international, with its glocality. This tension between local and global, so subtle in "Weapons and Children," betrays inklings of the exclusionary, even antisemitic and racist Iraqi nationalism that the poet would come to outwardly support later in his career. It is this tension, articulated both implicitly in al-Sayyāb's poem and explicitly in his 1959 memoir *I Was A Communist (Kuntu shuyūʿiyyan*),[254] that forms the subject of my investigation in this chapter.

In what follows, I explore how al-Sayyāb's experience of transnational Communism caused him to lose faith in the movement and eventually become a virulent Iraqi nationalist. I understand the Communists' presence in Iraq to be transnational because the movement was made up of non-elites, especially in Basra, where al-Sayyāb first became involved with Communism. Furthermore, non-governmental groups like the Peace Partisans, with whom al-Sayyāb was affiliated, are by definition transnational.[255] I argue that to understand the tensions at

[254] First written as a series of articles in the Iraqi newspaper *al-Ḥurriyyah*.

[255] We can distinguish transnational relations from international ones by considering who the actors involved are.

play in Sayyāb's poetry and politics, we must reevaluate our theoretical conception of literature's relationship to transnationalism. The current mode of transnational literary studies developed during the 1990s and became popular during the first decade of this century. In the 2005 collection *Minor Transnationalism*, Françoise Lionnet and Shu-mei Shih outline the differences between "transnationalism-from-above" and "transnationalism-from-below." The first is driven by a globalizing economy increasingly subservient to capitalism: homogenizing, totalizing, and—in a word—bad. Transnationalism-from-below, on the other hand, is "the sum of the counterhegemonic operations of the nonelite who refuse assimilation to one given nation-state."[256] However useful this paradigm is for investigating literature transnationally after the fall of the Berlin Wall and the end of the Cold War, it does not account for transnationalism-from-above driven not by capitalism but instead by Soviet (or Soviet-inspired) Communism. In al-Sayyāb's case, as I argue below, the limitations Communism placed on both literature and local nationalist movements initiated a transnational turn in his politics and poetics.

I trace al-Sayyāb's changing views of literary commitment from his time as a young Party member in Iraq until his ultimate break with the Communists. In my analysis of "Weapons and Children," I examine his struggles to reconcile Communist commitment with the influence Western literature had on his poetry. I show how his comrades rebuffed his abiding interest in Western literature and explore the beginnings of his disillusionment with the Party. Following the poet across the Iraqi border to Iran, where he hid out with the Tūdah Communists in August

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Transnational relations are defined as "regular interactions across national boundaries when at least one actor is a non-state agent or does not operate on behalf of a national government or an intergovernmental organization." *Bringing Transnational Relations Back In: Non-State Actors, Domestic Structures and International Institutions*, Thomas Risse-Kappen ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 3. Risse-Kappen updates the definition of the concept, initially offered in the late 1960s and early 1970s.

[256] *Minor Transnationalism*, 5-6, quoting Mahler, "Theoretical and Empirical Contributions toward a Research Agenda for Transnationalism," *Transnationalism from Below*, 64-100.

1953, I consider the event central to his own transnational turn: the American and British-backed coup against the democratically-elected Iranian leader Mohammad Mosaddegh. Once al-Sayyāb witnessed the Soviets' betrayal of the Tūdah in the aftermath of the coup, his belief in Communism was shaken to its core. In the end, I explain how Soviet transnationalism-from-above caused al-Sayyāb to abandon Communism in favor of an uncompromising Iraqi nationalism. Using al-Sayyāb's own model for understanding Western literature during his Communist period, I conclude by suggesting how his readers might continue to appreciate his work despite the unsavory and even deplorable political positions he eventually adopted.

Al-Sayyāb and the Communists

Al-Sayyāb started on the path to Communism early in his life while growing up in Jaykūr, a small village in southern Iraq. As a youth there, al-Sayyāb was intrigued by local Communist organizers, and he began his involvement with the Party long before he found any success as a poet. Jaykūr lies on the banks of Buwayb, a small tributary of the Shaṭṭ al-ʿArab river which divides Iraq and Iran.[257] The closest Iraqi city to Jaykūr, roughly twenty miles to the northwest, is Basra, and the Iranian city Khurramshahr (al-Muḥammarah in Arabic) lies to the east. It was in Jaykūr that al-Sayyāb first learned about Communism and wrote his early poetry before continuing his education at the Baghdad Teachers College. Communist activity in al-

[257] During al-Sayyāb's lifetime, an age-old dispute between Iran and Iraq over which country exercised sovereignty over the Shaṭṭ al-ʿArab flared a number of times. Paul Balta, "Relations between Iran and Iraq," *Iraq: Power and Society*, Derek Hopwood, Habib Ishow, and Thomas Koszinowski eds. (Reading, UK: Ithaca Press for St. Antony's College, Oxford, 1993), 386-388. Political conflicts over the borderlands near Basra often boiled over into social strife during the early part of the twentieth century due to the presence of significant populations of Persians on the Iraqi side of the Shaṭṭ al-ʿArab and vice versa. Reidar Visser, *Basra, the Failed Gulf State: Separatism and Nationalism in Southern Iraq* (Berlin: LIT Verlag, 2005; New Brunswick: Transaction Publishers, 2006), 128-130.

Sayyāb's hometown ranged from holding small weekly gatherings[258] to using Jaykūr and other small villages in the area of Abū al-Khaṣīb to the east of Basra as staging grounds for cross-border missions to Iran.[259] The porous border between Iraq and Iran near his hometown would later play an important part in his decision to return there when his political activities eventually brought him to the attention of the Iraqi authorities.

By the time al-Sayyāb published "Weapons and Children," however, he had already become ambivalent about Communism and its claims in support of pacifism. Although the poem retains many of the themes al-Sayyāb had depended on during his period of complete Communist commitment (primary among them his critique of the world capitalist economy), there are also hints of his disenchantment with Communist ideology. These include his refusal to bow to the demands of Communist literary critics in Iraq, with whom he was continually at odds. In *I Was A Communist*, al-Sayyāb derides the Communists' dismissal of the poets who had so profoundly influenced his own work—including T.S. Eliot, William Shakespeare, and even the most famous Arab poet, al-Mutanabbī (d. 965 CE)—as "feudal," "reactionary," and "bourgeois."[260] Al-Sayyāb would continue his disparagement of Communist aesthetics in a speech he made at the 1961 Rome Conference on Modern Arabic Literature.[261] There, he took aim both at the Communists' restrictive models for transnationalism-from-above and at their mode of ahistorical literary criticism, which at times veered toward the laughable:

[258] Al-Sayyāb, *Kuntu shuyūʿiyyan*, 248.

[259] Al-Sayyāb, *Kuntu shuyūʿiyyan*, 146-148.

[260] Al-Sayyāb, *Kuntu shuyūʿiyyan*, 105, 174, 218-219.

[261] For the proceedings, see *al-Adab al-ʿarabī al-muʿāṣir*.

> One Iraqi Communist wrote an article on al-Mutanabbī and his poem about Bawwān Valley,[262] using the following line as a starting point:
>
> In Bawwān Valley my horse asked,
> 'Shall we leave this life of ease for battle?'
>
> (*yaqūlu bi-Shiʿbi Bawwānin ḥiṣānī a-ʿan hādhā yusāru ila ʾṭ-ṭiʿāni*)[263]
>
> He concluded from this that al-Mutanabbī was in favor of war while his horse supported peace. Despite the fact that I was a Communist at the time, I commented on his article, saying that al-Mutanabbī's horse must have signed the Stockholm Appeal with its hoof.[264]

Al-Sayyāb was further incensed by another Iraqi Communist who "described Shakespeare as a 'reactionary, feudalist poet' who only talked about kings, princes, and pimps and never workers and peasants." Al-Sayyāb responded by asking how Shakespeare had the option to be a Communist since Marx had not even been born yet. He later wondered to himself, "Why should we blame this Iraqi Communist for such a position when *The Daily Worker*—the newspaper of the British Communist Party—has taken the same position on Shakespeare, attacking him because he did not express the interests and hopes of the proletariat?"[265]

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[262] "A well-forested area in Fars, Iran." Glossary of Names and Terms in Muḥammad al-Muwayliḥī, *What ʿĪsā Ibn Hishām Told Us or A Period of Time*, Vol. II, Roger Allen ed. and trans., Philip Kennedy vol. ed. (New York: New York University Press, 2015), 371. "Bawwān Valley is located near Shiraz [in Iran], full of trees and water, and counted among the paradises on earth." *Sharḥ dīwān al-Mutanabbī*, waḍaʿahu ʿAbd al-Raḥmān al-Barqūqī, Vol. 4 (al-Qāhirah: 1938), 383.

[263] *Sharḥ dīwān al-Mutanabbī* (1938), 389. I have emended al-Sayyāb's quotation, where he gives "*a-min*" in place of "*a-ʿan*." Margaret Larkin translates the first section of the poem, including the line I have translated here, in "The Poetics of Cultural Identity: Al-Mutanabbī among the Būyids," *Islamic Cultures, Islamic Contexts: Essays in Honor of Professor Patricia Crone*, Behnam Sadeghi, Asad Q. Ahmed, Adam Silverstein, and Robert Hoyland eds., *Islamic History and Civilizations: Studies and Texts*, Hinrich Biesterfeldt, Sebastian Günther, and Wadad Kadi eds. (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2015), 395-396.

[264] Al-Sayyāb, "*al-Iltizām wa-l-lāiltizām*," 247. The Stockholm Appeal was the name of the 1950 call to ban all nuclear weapons.

[265] Al-Sayyāb, "*al-Iltizām wa-l-lāiltizām*," 246-247.

Al-Sayyāb's own literary tastes were not limited to the socialist realism the Iraqi Communists championed. In his Rome talk, he argues,

> I would not be going too far if I were to say that modern European civilization has faced no deeper or more violent ridicule than that of T. S. Eliot in his poem *The Waste Land*, not in everything Communist writers and poets have written against capitalism's role in said civilization. […] Everything the Communist poets have said against capitalism pales in comparison to *The Waste Land*, despite how much hate and revulsion they have expressed about capitalism.[266]

Even while al-Sayyāb was an avowed Communist, then, he appreciated Western poets like Shakespeare and Eliot from an historical perspective based on aesthetics rather than politics. The rural, local, communal models of Communism toward which he was inclined as a youth gradually came into conflict with the internationalist Communism to which he was exposed later in life. Likewise, the more familiarity he gained with the foundational works of Western modernism, the less capable he felt of adhering to the Party's strict, at times dismissive and ahistorical aesthetic line.

Although, as its title tells us, we must remember that al-Sayyāb composed *I Was A Communist* after his turn away from Communism, it is worth considering nonetheless how the Party is intimately bound up with his recollections of childhood and adolescence in Jaykūr. As al-Sayyāb amply explains, his hometown's impoverished and marginalized socio-economic situation as a forgotten backwater in rural Iraq played an important part in his early profession of Communist beliefs. While his family was not nearly as well off as the families of his schoolmates or his later intellectual coterie in Baghdad,[267] their small landholdings provided his

[266] Al-Sayyāb, "*al-Iltizām wa-l-lāiltizām*," 248-249.

[267] Although al-Sayyāb's interest in Western literature developed early on in his educational career, he did not have the financial resources to further his studies abroad like other notable members of the contemporary Iraqi literary scene. Nāzik al-Malāʾikah, who pioneered the formal changes of the free verse movement along with al-Sayyāb, studied at Princeton and received an M.A. in Comparative Literature from the University of Wisconsin, Madison in the United States. Jabrā Ibrāhīm Jabrā, who would further al-Sayyāb's engagement with T.S. Eliot's source text on

grandfather with the resources to hire laborers. One of the anecdotes in al-Sayyāb's memoir that takes place at his grandfather's house dramatizes his early Communist-inspired idealism.

> My grandfather had one peasant (*fallāḥ*) named Maḥmūd Ṭayyārah who had been living on his plot of land for only a few months, and when he left, he took the shovels, sieves, and other tools with him. Anyone would recognize it as theft and robbery. My grandfather found out about it and sent someone to bring Maḥmūd Ṭayyārah to him. At the time, I had been suspended from the Baghdad Teachers College.[268] It being around sunset on a winter night, I was sitting by the fireplace in the reception room reading *The Mother* by Maxim Gorky,[269] and the novel had stirred up my feelings. When my grandfather confronted Maḥmūd, he asked him about the shovels, sieves, and the rest of the tools. 'They are not your shovels and sieves,' the peasant audaciously replied, 'they are mine, the peasant's!'
>
> My grandfather, who was a strong man, launched at the peasant, flung him down on a wooden bed, and started beating him with a cane. Do you know what I did? I intervened and separated the two of them. I was able to get the cane away from my grandfather, so I put it in the peasant's hand. Then I took his hand in mine, and—since he would never dare to do it himself—I started beating my grandfather over the head with the cane.
>
> I thought what I had done was the most heroic thing ever, a victory for the toiling peasant over the hateful feudal lord—even if the peasant was a thief! In sum, these are what Communist morals are like wherever they may be, not just in Iraq.[270]

Although we cannot be sure if al-Sayyāb is a reliable narrator in light of his break with Communism having occurred years before he wrote his memoir, the passage still reveals to us the primary importance al-Sayyāb assigns to literature's role in the development of his political

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myth by sharing with him his translation of James Frazer's *The Golden Bough*, studied at Cambridge in the United Kingdom. Al-Sayyāb chose to attend the Baghdad Teachers College because there was no tuition fee. Terri Lynn DeYoung, "And thereby hangs a tale: A study of myth in modern Arabic poetry," PhD diss. (The University of California, Berkeley, 1988), 105.

[268] For "his [1946] leadership of a student strike protesting the lengthening of the teacher training program from four to five years." DeYoung, *Placing the Poet*, 69.

[269] This 1906 novel about Russian workers was popular among Communists, and al-Sayyāb mentions elsewhere that it was often read at Communist meetings in Iraq. Al-Sayyāb, "*al-Iltizām wa-l-lāiltizām*," 254.

[270] Al-Sayyāb, *Kuntu shuyūʿiyyan*, 53-54.

consciousness as a young man. He recalls that *The Mother* "had stirred up [his] feelings," which led to his entering the fray in defense of "the toiling peasant" and against his own grandfather, "the hateful feudal lord." Moreover, the elder al-Sayyāb clarifies in this reflection that he thinks "Communist morals" are merely a cover for the commission of immoral acts: refusing to recognize obvious thievery and disrespecting one's own family members.

Al-Sayyāb had officially joined the ICP while he was a student at the Baghdad Teachers College in 1945.[271] He later took part in many popular demonstrations, including January 1948's *Wathbah* ("the Leap"; a revolt against continued British influence in Iraq after the signing of the Portsmouth Treaty on 15 January 1948)[272] and the *Intifāḍah* (the "shaking off" of British influence in Iraqi politics) that stretched across the latter half of 1952 and came to a head with widespread demonstrations in the Iraqi capital on 22-23 November of the same year.[273] For his participation in the *Wathbah* and his affiliation with the ICP, al-Sayyāb lost his first teaching job in al-Ramādī.[274] He worked there only four months (September 1948-January 1949) before the government imprisoned him until April 1949.[275]

These years were a productive time not only for al-Sayyāb's political activity, but also for his poetry writing. After his pioneering reconfigurations of premodern Arabic poetic forms in the

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[271] DeYoung, *Placing the Poet*, 45; al-Sayyāb, *Kuntu shuyūʿiyyan*, 11.

[272] Beth K. Dougherty and Edmund A. Ghareeb*, Historical Dictionary of Iraq*, Jon Woronoff ed., 2nd ed. (Plymouth, UK: Scarecrow Press, 2013), 484.

[273] Kevin Jones, "The Poetics of Revolution: Cultures, Practices, and Politics of Anti-Colonialism in Iraq, 1932-1960," PhD diss. (The University of Michigan, 2013), 251-257 and Matthew Elliot, *Independent Iraq: The Monarchy & British Influence, 1941-1958* (London: Tauris Academic Studies, 1996), 66-96.

[274] ʿAbd al-Wahhāb al-Bayātī writes that a posting to al-Ramādī, west of Baghdad and the capital of the Anbar governorate, was an especially difficult one reserved for recent graduates of the Teachers College who had fiery political views the government wanted to stamp out. *Yanābīʿ al-shams: al-sīrah al-shiʿriyyah*, 1st ed. (Dimashq: Dār al-Farqad li-l-Ṭabāʿah wa-l-Nashr wa-l-Tawzīʿ, 1999), 89.

[275] DeYoung, *Placing the Poet*, 221.

late 1940s, when he first started experimenting with forms based on the poetic foot rather than the line in shorter poems, he had now begun exploring the possibilities such a formal approach offered for long poems. One of these, the 422-line "Weapons and Children," he wrote during a transitional period when his political interests were shifting from global, transnational Communist calls for peace to local Iraqi nationalism.

An Analysis of "Weapons and Children"

The long poem "Weapons and Children," which has received little critical attention, is representative of a transitional period in al-Sayyāb's poetic career, combining elements of purely Communist commitment with nuanced poetic imagery that challenges its explicit political stance. By drawing on the work of Western poets, it defies categorization as Communist socialist realism.

The poem was initially published in a chapbook (*kurrās mustaqill*) in 1954, but it was written in 1953. Al-Sayyāb would later add it to his 1960 collection, *Unshūdat al-maṭar* (*Rain Song*).[276] At first blush, the poem seems to fit the standard for committed poetry, which had taken off in the Arab world following the 1948 disaster in Palestine. However, the poem struggles to balance its speaker's conflicting commitments to the transnational pacifist movement on the one hand with his Iraqi nationalism on the other. The speaker of the poem oscillates between a transnationally-inflected Communist perspective on the world, in which the Soviet Union and postcolonial nations are pitted against an aggressive, capitalist West, and a local, rural, and Iraqi frame of reference, focused on a nameless village on the Shaṭṭ al-ʿArab.

[276] Yūsuf ʿAṭā al-Ṭarīfī, *Badr Shākir al-Sayyāb: Ḥāyatuh wa-shiʿruh* (ʿAmmān: al-Ahliyyah li-l-Nashr wa-l-Tawziʿ, 2008), 299. The version found in the *dīwān* is shorter than the first edition. The differences between the two are significant, and I discuss them below.

The main target of the poem—whether we read it as an example of Communist commitment or Iraqi nationalism—is a merchant symbolizing both global capitalism and Western colonial regimes.

The poem narrates a number of interwoven stories, each of them punctuated with a merchant's incessant calls for *ḥadīd* (iron) and *raṣāṣ* (lead or bullets), which he buys up to resell to the warmongers of the world. Beyond its thematic import, however, the merchant's cry also formally structures the poem, as these words match the constituent foot of its meter, called *al-mutaqārib* (the tripping) in Arabic. In its perfect form (the *baḥr*, or sea), this meter consists of eight repetitions of the poetic foot *faʿūlun* (˘ ¯ ¯), four to each hemistich.[277] Thus, *al-mutaqārib* is one of the eight meters one can, according to al-Sayyāb's contemporary Nāzik al-Malāʾikah, use to compose in Arabic free verse because the same foot may be repeated as often as the poet likes and not break with the meter.[278] (Al-Sayyāb uses this to his advantage as he varies the number of feet per line from one to four.) The merchant's cries for *ḥadīd* and *raṣāṣ* both have a metrical value that exactly matches the basic foot of the poem's meter, a short followed by two longs.[279] These words repeated throughout the poem, therefore, tie the piece together both formally and thematically: their shared metrical value matches the poem's overall meter, while the merchant, the embodiment of capitalism in the poem, is never satisfied and keeps shouting

[277] See Wright, *A Grammar of the Arabic Language*, Vol. 2, 363-364.

[278] *Qaḍāyā al-shiʿr al-muʿāṣir* (1967), 34.

[279] The final *d* and *ṣ* of the words scan long due to the vocalization they get in Arabic, a pronounced *ḍummah tanwīn* (*un*) indicating that they are in a standard nominal state when the words are non-final in a line. When they come at the end of a line, the final letter in each automatically scans long because of the standard prescripts of Arabic prosody, thoroughly addressed in the "*ʿArūḍ*" entry in the *EI2*. These words take the place of the word for "weapons" within the poem because this title word does not fit its metrical pattern. The two short syllables of the Arabic *asliḥah* (scanning ¯ ˘ ˘) preclude it from matching the repeated rhythm of ˘ ¯ ¯, whatever the order of the poetic feet.

for more iron to buy up and resell. The metrical link between the words in the merchant's cry and the poem's meter formally represents how capitalism's omnipresence forms the rhythm of modern life.

Thematically, the poem revolves around a series of opposites.[280] Parallel to the canonized critical take on Nīmā's symbolic use of night (repression; stagnation; death) and day (freedom; dynamism; life), "Weapons and Children" is founded on the dichotomy of water (innocence; beginning; life) and fire (guilt; end; death). Along with water, the first category includes children, birds (and nature more generally), music, dolls, and harvest scenes, whereas weapons, bombs, gunfire, bullets, and scorched earth occupy the category represented by fire. Light (*nūr*) appears throughout the poem in opposition to darkness (*ẓalām*; *ẓulmah*). The merchant is the agent of change through which the elements in the first category are transformed into those in the second one. This occurs most clearly through his purchase and reuse of iron. He transforms bed-frames into weapons and dolls' eyes into bullets, thus transmogrifying childhood innocence into terror. Overall, the poem's central conceit shows that capitalism destroys whereas filiative community builds.

"Weapons and Children" depends on the cyclical rhythms of ancient Near Eastern myths of death and rebirth. These same myths laid the groundwork of earlier Western modernist poems, like T.S. Eliot's *The Waste Land*, which inspired al-Sayyāb's own integration of mythic themes into his poetry. I say inspired rather than influenced here because al-Sayyāb was careful about how he used references to Western literature in his poetry. In fact, when discussing his reading of

[280] Iḥsān ʿAbbās points out the contrast of children's absolute innocence with the loss of innocence that accompanies their transformation into soldiers in his analysis of the poem. *Badr Shākir al-Sayyāb: Dirāsah fī ḥayātih wa-shiʿrih*, (Bayrūt: Dār al-Thaqāfah, 1969), 185.

T.S. Eliot's essay "Tradition and the Individual Talent"[281] in a letter to Yūsuf al-Khāl, editor of the Lebanese poetry magazine *Shiʿr*, al-Sayyāb would later argue that Arabic poetry "must not be some kind of Western monstrosity in Arab or semi-Arab garb. We must make use of the best there is in our poetic heritage at the same time we make use of what the Westerners have perfected—especially by those who speak English—in the world of poetry."[282] Al-Sayyāb's knowledge of Western modernist poetry developed over a period of many years, and he worked diligently to create a new poetics through his engagement with both Western poetry and the Arabic tradition.[283] Al-Sayyāb came to myths of death and rebirth through his readings of Eliot, and his understanding of these myths was mediated by *The Waste Land* until at least 1954, when he read Jabrā Ibrāhīm Jabrā's translation of James Frazer's *The Golden Bough*.[284]

Frazer's work had also inspired T.S. Eliot, who cited *The Golden Bough*'s influence on *The Waste Land*.[285] Poets from across the Arab world such as Adūnīs, Ṣalāḥ ʿAbd al-Ṣabūr (d. 1981), Yūsuf al-Khāl (d. 1987), Khalīl Ḥāwī (d. 1982), and many others who took inspiration from the same myths of death and rebirth were called the Tammūzī poets, after Tammūz, an

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[281] T.S. Eliot, "Tradition and the Individual Talent," *The Sacred Wood: Essays on Poetry and Criticism* (London: Methuen & Co. Ltd. 1934), 47-59.

[282] Al-Samarrāʾī, *Rasāʾil al-Sayyāb*, 130; Terri DeYoung trans., *Badr Shakir Al-Sayyab: Three Letters*, *Jadaliyya*, 24 December 2014, http://www.jadaliyya.com/pages/index/20362/badr-shakir-al-sayyab_three-letters.

[283] For a thorough analysis of al-Sayyāb's engagement with Eliot, see Nazeer El-Azma, "The Tammūzī Movement and the Influence of T.S. Eliot on Badr Shākir al-Sayyāb," *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 88, no. 4 (Oct. - Dec., 1968), 671-678.

[284] See ʿĪsā Bullāṭah, *Badr Shākir al-Sayyāb: Ḥayātuh wa-shiʿiruh* (Bayrūt: Dār al-Nahār li-l-Nashr, 1971), 81. Jabrā mentions that al-Sayyāb read a manuscript of his translation in the Introduction to its second edition. Jayms Frīzir, *Adūnīs aw Tammūz: Dirāsah fī al-asāṭīr wa-l-adyān al-sharqiyyah al-qadīmah*, tarjamat Jabrā Ibrāhīm Jabrā (Bayrūt: al-Muʾassasah al-ʿArabiyyah li-l-Dirāsāt wa-l-nashr, 1979), 11. See also Jabrā Ibrāhīm Jabrā, *al-Riḥlah al-thāminah: dirāsāt naqdiyyah* (Ṣaydā: al-Maktabah al-ʿAṣriyyah, 1967), 24. The source text is James Frazer, *The golden bough: a study in magic and religion* (New York: MacMillan, 1922; bartleby.com 2000). http://www.bartleby.com/196/.

[285] T.S. Eliot, *The Waste Land*, 5.

ancient Mesopotamian deity who died each year and came back to life. The ancients worshipped Tammūz, also known as Adonis or Osiris, in a variety of ways throughout the Near East and North Africa, but the central elements of the vegetation and fertility ceremonies honoring him are similar.[286] The Tammūzī poets drew on Eliot's poem and used the figure of the continually-reborn deity as a multifaceted symbol representing the potential for the rebirth of the Arab nation after colonialism, a revolutionary model for spiritual renaissance, or sometimes a tragic figure, continually stuck in an endless cycle, doomed to live and die again forever. All these versions of Tammūz appear in al-Sayyāb's poetry. However, his poetry's ambivalent relationship to its political context requires that we consider it with this final, tragic Tammūz in mind.[287]

The first section of the poem immediately takes recourse to the corpus of Near Eastern myth with a reference to the Iraqi sailor and adventurer, Sindbad (*al-Sindibād*)—his only appearance in all of the poem's 422 lines.

> Birds? Or children laughing,
> A glint of tomorrow sparkling at them?
> Their bare feet
> Are seashells clinking on a waterwheel
> The hems of their robes are the north wind,
> Blowing over a field of wheat,
> The hiss of bread baking on a holiday,
> Or a mother gurgling her newborn's name
> Sweetly whispering to him on his first day.
> It is as if I hear the sails flapping
> As Sindbad storms out to sea.
> He saw a vast treasure between his ribs,
> Chose no other treasure, and returned.[288]

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[286] Frazer, *The golden bough,* http://www.bartleby.com/196/79.html.

[287] Terri DeYoung offers the most nuanced reading of al-Sayyāb's *Unshūdat al-maṭar* ("Rain Song") by tracing this pessimistic line of thought throughout the poem. My understanding of al-Sayyāb's poetics is indebted to her article "A New Reading of Badr Shākir al-Sayyāb's 'Hymn of the Rain,'" *JAL* 24, no. 1 (March, 1993): 39-61.

[288] These lines are also translated by DeYoung in *Placing the Poet*, 102. I have consulted her translation here, departing from it in some cases.

DeYoung discusses how these first lines set up an idyllic scene—like many others found throughout al-Sayyāb's body of work that describe country scenes around his hometown, Jaykūr.[289] Sindbad is the ideal hero who always returns after his adventures at sea. The idea of return along with the repeating pattern of stories telling about Sindbad's seven journeys sets up the overall sequence of the poem. DeYoung further points out that since this is the only mention of Sindbad,[290] these lines—filled with hope, new life, and productive nature and host to the perfect hero—contrast sharply with later sections defined by the coming of capitalism (which the merchant symbolizes), war, and death. Additionally, Sindbad's presence here at the beginning of the poem suggests the start of a journey following a usual sequence,[291] which indicates the poem's primary organizational feature: the general pattern of death and rebirth myths. Al-Sayyāb's integration of the Sindbad cycle into these lines continues the Sindbad myth, adding an eighth (and not necessarily final) journey into the unknown. Jabrā Ibrāhīm Jabrā would play on the same idea of infinite returns in the title of one of his essay collections, *al-Riḥlah al-thāminah* (*The Eighth Journey*), and by mentioning Sindbad in these initial lines, "Weapons and Children" introduces the reader to the cycle that structures it.

However, because the poem collapses Sindbad's story cycle into a mere three lines ("Sindbad storms out to sea […] and returned"), the myth is reduced to its constituent frame

[289] "Sayyab's poems represent Jaykur (his home village in southern Iraq) as an almost utopian space related to emotionality, memory, lost childhood, and the source of a sense of identity threatened by exile. Jaykur, with its river, Buwayb, and palm trees, was also linked to motherly warmth and a sense of nostalgia evoked by the loneliness and strangeness of the city." Orit Bashkin, *The Other Iraq: Pluralism and Culture in Hashemite Iraq* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2009), 226.

[290] DeYoung, *Placing the Poet*, 103.

[291] For a detailed analysis of the structure of the Sindbad tales and other information on the text, see Mia I. Gerhardt, *The Art of Story-Telling: A Literary Study of the Thousand and One Nights* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1963), 236-263.

parts. Sindbad's story remains incomplete; all the poem includes are the perfunctory elements of the usual pattern of the tale: Sindbad's initial wanderlust and ultimate return. It leaves out the all-important adventure section where something new happens. Sindbad instead chooses the treasure "between his ribs" (that is, within himself), which takes the place of the usual adventure section. "Weapons and Children" becomes a new story, an eighth journey in which the poem's speaker stands in for Sindbad, who always narrates his own tales in the *Thousand and One Nights*. "It is as if *I* hear the sails flapping," the speaker declares, taking on Sindbad's role as storyteller and hero destined to return to the sea again and again. Individuality is central to the poem's message, as individual choices lead to the eventual destruction and ruin found in its later sections. By replacing Sindbad, the speaker gains the ability to tell his own story of life and hope, but he must struggle to break out of the unending cycle of Sindbad's tales in the same way the people in the poem strive to escape the continual cycle of death and rebirth.

In "Weapons and Children," the speaker frequently emphasizes the importance of the individual's role in society. Al-Sayyāb closely follows the rules Nāzik al-Malāʾikah lays out in her manifesto on free verse, where she writes, "It seems that the general governing code (*al-qānūn*) in the movements of renewal (*ḥarakāt al-tajdīd*) is that they are all attempts to strike a new balance between the position of the individual (*al-fard*) and society (*al-ummah*)."[292] Al-Sayyāb himself comments on how the Communists' treatment of individuals situates Communism in opposition to this modernist valorization of individual experience. The Communists, al-Sayyāb complains, "crush the individual (*al-fard*) in order to protect the interests of the group (*al-majmūʿ*). But what does the group consist of? Is it not made up of individuals? If

[292] *Qaḍāyā al-shiʿr al-muʿāṣir* (1967), 37.

we break down every individual, won't the group then be made up of broken units and thus in turn itself be broken?"[293]

By focusing on individual experience, al-Sayyāb extends a theme that played a defining role in Arab Romanticism,[294] and his lyric "I" in "Weapons and Children" is a Romantic one. With Sindbad absent after his only appearance in the poem, al-Sayyāb's lyric "I" steps in as hero, witness, and even prophet. Contrary to what we would expect in a Communist poem, the individual takes precedence over the group to witness their suffering. Al-Sayyāb immediately undermines the poem's purported Communist commitment in its first lines by focusing on the individual experience of the poem's speaker.

Furthermore, al-Sayyāb's nod to Sindbad early in the poem situates the story inside a frame tale. "Gentlemen," "Friends," or "Fellows," Sindbad begins each new tale.[295] Moreover, "Weapons and Children" addresses itself to its audience as a politically committed work. Taking a biographical, contextual approach to the poem, we can see the links between al-Sayyāb's pacifist position as an affiliate of the Peace Partisans and the calls for peace that resound throughout the poem. However, if we continue teasing out the didactic threads that hold the poem together after its initial Sindbad allusion, its explicit Communist-inspired commitment soon unravels to reveal a modernist patchwork that challenges any one overarching narrative. By combining citations of Western drama with descriptions of the Iraqi countryside, the poem

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[293] *Kuntu shuyūʿiyyan*, 121.

[294] Shmuel Moreh, *Modern Arabic Poetry 1800-1970*, 121; *Modern Arabic Poetry: An Anthology*, Salma Khadra Jayyusi ed. (New York: Columbia University Press, 1987), 5.

[295] See Husain Haddawy's able translation of the whole series, *The Arabian Nights II: Sindbad and Other Popular Stories* (New York: W. W. Norton and Company, 1995), 3-51.

invites us to explore the tension between the local and the global within it as well as the more obvious socio-political reading that invited the Iraqi Communists' praise upon its publication.[296]

It goes on cycling between childhood (full of life and possibility) and adulthood (when the future has become limited in the face of death):

> An echo crossing over the ages:
> From the cave, the forest, and the temple
> A warm brook filled with the sweat of stones,
> And the chisel of their overworked stonemason
> Sings of his untamable yearning
> For the lofty summit…
> To subdue Death with Life.
> [Life's] coming generations shall meet [Death]
> Upon a rock his hands hold
> Greeting him with a smile on the lips,
> With eyes whose streaming tears
> Have hardened into stone.

While DeYoung suggests that the idyllic scene of the first thirteen lines is left behind entirely after Sindbad's departure, some of its features continue throughout the entire first section, where the cycle of death and rebirth is fully incorporated into the poem. Life emerges in an echo with water—"the sweat of stones"—flowing out of both the physical world (the mineral of the cave and the plant of the forest) and faith (the temple) to meet death. However, life must always face death throughout the generations, and each succeeding encounter with death returns life to its source. The tears life sheds when it meets death turn into stone, bringing the cycle back to its beginning. The imagery al-Sayyāb employs here is reminiscent of the Greek myth of Niobe, whose fourteen children Apollo and Artemis killed when she boasted about their number. Niobe then turned into a stone that continually weeps for her dead offspring year after year, just like life does in the above lines.

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[296] ʿAbbās, *Badr Shākir al-Sayyāb*, 220.

The cycle is inescapable, but if there is any hope, it lies in the recurrent possibility of the next generation. In the explicitly dualist world of "Weapons and Children," only children offer hope for the future against the forces of death, embodied by the merchant and symbolized by iron and bullets—none of which appears until the second section. The poem's first section ends by imbuing children with a symbolic resonance defined by hope, optimism, innocence, and new beginning in defiance of death and its agents, represented up to this point only by natural phenomena: winter and old age.

> On long winter nights, [children] are
> A spring of warmth and good health,
> From which the elderly collect roses
> Gazing once again on childhood
> Dancing among the hills
> And rocking in a cradle of imagination
> With a virgin on a moonlit night
> In the shadow of an apple blossom
> Where birds sleep.
> In the morning, they
> Are the sound of steps on the ladder
> Hands on sleepy faces
> Playfully tickling them awake.
> They are one of those songs of the road,
> One of those old tunes
> One of those rushing voices.
> They are beside Mother when she wakes up,
> When the fire is lit on the hearth
> Like a line you can see tomorrow begin on.

In the world created within the poem, children are the only ones who can defeat death. The above lines begin by describing children as a spring season (*rabīʿ*) during winter and go on to associate them once more with an idyllic scene that reminds the elderly of their own childhood. The early morning dawning over the final lines of the section combines with the symbolism of the children to represent a new beginning in the fire on the hearth (signifying home, health, and protection) that is "like a line (*khayṭ*) you can see tomorrow begin on."

In this first section, the poem deals exclusively with the symbolic role of children in the death-rebirth myth after the initial invocation of Sindbad. In section two, the poem's intertextuality shifts from Near Eastern myth to the Western literary tradition. Notwithstanding the poem's implicit and explicit Communist commitment (in its criticism of the merchant and capitalism more broadly), it directly references Western poets as canonical and central to the English tradition as William Shakespeare. These intertextual references are integral to the poem's meaning, though al-Sayyāb's willingness to engage with Western poetry falls foul of the ICP's requirements for committed literature. Consider Romeo and Juliet's dialog in these lines, which come at the beginning of the poem's second section, following the extended description of the idyllic rural scene populated with children, flowers, butterflies, and birds:

> Birds? Or children laughing
> Or water, ripened by stone,
> So the grass becomes moist and the flowers dewy
> Flowers and light
> A lark singing,
> And an apple blossom.
> The flap of bird wings has
> An echo of a mother's kiss on her baby's cheek
> 'Wilt thou be gone? That was not the lark!
> Believe me, [love,] it was the nightingale,
> Yon light is not daylight.'[297]
> Are those the ships that lost course
> On the way to a harbor lamented by the winds?
> Soldiers' hands beckoning there
> To a thousand Juliets on the dock,
> 'Goodbye, goodbye to those who don't return.'
> For a mother, all alone during fall
> Behind the darkness, a tree stripped of her leaves
> Whose songbirds have fled!

[297] The note in the edition of the poem used here reads, "Shakespeare: *Romeo and Juliet*." The exact lines are not given, but they are 3.5.1, 5, and 12. Al-Sayyāb, who studied English, probably engaged with the text in the original, either during his school days or at the Teachers College in Baghdad. Shakespeare citations refer to *William Shakespeare: The Complete Works*, Alfred Harbage ed. (Baltimore, MD: Penguin Books, 1972).

In the first line, the speaker asks whether it is birds singing or children laughing that he hears. The confusion between the two began in the first section, where birds leaving their nest were likened to children leaving home. The poem continues playing on this mixture between the two, connecting child, mother, and bird wings in a single moment, "The flap of bird wings has / An echo of a mother's kiss on her baby's cheek." Suddenly, the innocent scene between child and mother collapses with Juliet's question to Romeo at the end of their first (and only) night together, "Wilt thou be gone? That was not the lark (*al-qubbarah*)! / Believe me, [love,] it was the nightingale (*al-bulbul*), / Yon light is not daylight." Although Juliet attempts to deny the coming of daybreak by claiming she hears a nightingale instead of the lark, the sunrise indicates that the time has come for Romeo to leave her bed before being discovered as he is wanted for the murder of Juliet's cousin Tybalt and faces a death penalty in Verona. In "Weapons and Children," these lines represent the impossible wish of holding on to childhood innocence, which passes away with time. Shakespeare's lines reverse the motif of dawn as rebirth to reveal it instead as the herald of ever-approaching death. The lines thus upend the idyllic imagery that extended from the first section of the poem and signal the coming of the inevitable: the children from the earlier lines grow up to become soldiers, cast out on the seas like Romeo on the road to Mantua. Now adults of fighting age, the children long for their idyllic past, "Soldiers' hands beckoning there / To a thousand Juliets on the dock," while the mother whose kisses fluttered on her children's cheeks like bird wings is left alone, "a tree stripped of her leaves / Whose songbirds have fled!"

Just as Juliet's wishful thinking cannot halt the progress of time or stop the break of day, so too the children's transformation into adults makes them targets for the merchants of death. Shakespeare's lines thus indicate the untenability and the coming demise of the idyll, a finality

further compounded by autumn's approach (the mother who loses her children like a tree stripped of leaves) and the flight of the songbirds. These lines pave the way for the terror, death, and disease to come, and only after the idyllic scene is firmly situated in the past following Juliet's question does the merchant's cry first appear in the poem.

By quoting lines from *Romeo and Juliet*, al-Sayyāb adds a new aesthetic dimension to "Weapons and Children," creating a transitional space between the initial descriptions of the idyll and the scenes of war that follow them. Romeo and Juliet's only night together ends, and they must give in to the reality of their situation and the impossibility of their love as a new day dawns. Likewise, the rural, communal, and local Communist idyll of the poem's first half (and indeed, we might say, of al-Sayyāb's childhood in Jaykur) must give way to the global, internationalist visions of the Party that structure the second half of the poem, but with which al-Sayyāb would subsequently become disillusioned.

After Romeo leaves Juliet, death and destruction take over the poem, as the merchant's cry for iron and bullets resounds throughout its lines. Although the first line repeats again, the reader knows the sounds are no longer birds—which fled in the previous line—but instead children's laughter or rippling water, soon to be drowned out in the clash of war:

> Birds? Or children laughing
> Or water, ripened by stone,
> Running over a bloodied corpse (*juththatin dāmiyah*)?
> And a lark singing
> For a dilapidated ruin (*khirbatin bāliyah*)?
> Birds?!
> No, children singing,
> Their lives in a tyrant's hands (*fī yadi 'ṭ-ṭāghiyah*),
> And rising over their sweet, pure songs
> A far-off call,
> 'Old iron
> Bullets
> Iron.'
> And like the shadow of a hawk in open country—

When he strikes, like a passing blade,
Birds will sing out over the hills—
Thrown at the feet of innocent children,
A call in which I smell blood,
'Old iron
        Old iron!
Bullets.' As if the air
Were bullets, and as if the road
Were old iron.
Scattered about, like pickaxes,
The terrifying sound of the merchant's steps.
Woe unto him! What does he want?
'Old iron
        Bullets
                Iron!'
Woe unto you ill-omened merchant (*la-ka 'l-waylu min tājirin ashʾam*),
Who plunges into a stream of blood (*wa-min khāʾiḍin fī masīli 'd-dam*)
Who has no idea that what he's buying (*wa-min jāhilin anna mā yashtarīh*)
To stave off hunger and want from his own children
Are the very graves they'll be buried in!
'Old iron
        Bullets
                Iron'
Old iron for a new death!

With Juliet now left alone and Romeo on his fateful trip to Mantua, the promise of their love fades into the past, just as the mother-as-tree's protection of her children-as-birds evaporated in the earlier lines. The life-giving water from the first section is now "running over a bloodied corpse," and the lark, who heralded Juliet's dreaded dawn, sings a requiem for the faded memories of the past. The end-rhymes of the lines link together death and destruction; "*juththatin dāmiyah*" ("a bloodied corpse") rhymes with "*khirbatin bāliyah*" ("a dilapidated ruin") as well as "*fī yadi 'ṭ-ṭāghiyah*" ("in a tyrant's hands"), to which the children are now entrusted. (The phrases' shared metrical weight, ¯ / ˘ ¯ ¯ / ˘ ¯ [¯], adds to their

interconnection.)[298] As the children's innocence fades away, the merchant's cry rises above their songs in a refrain that will repeat throughout the rest of the poem.

When the speaker of the poem hears the call, "Old iron / Bullets / Iron," he takes on a prophetic tone of admonishment, "Woe unto you ill-omened merchant." The parallel grammatical and metrical structure of "*tājir,*" "*khāʾiḍ*," and "*jāhil*" (three active nouns all in the *fāʿil* form literally meaning "one who trades," "one who plunges," and "one who is ignorant of") further accentuates the irony of the merchant's trade by linking all three words together. Although the merchant "plunges into a stream of blood" to complete his business transactions, he "has no idea that what he is buying / To stave off hunger and want from his own children / Are the very graves they'll be buried in!"

The merchant's call only ceases in the seventh section, where the poem's progression once more hinges on an intertextual citation of Shakespeare to make its point. Extending the criticism leveled against the merchant in section two, the poem continues,

> Peace to the whole wide world
> To east and west alike,
> Peace to Avon, which filled the veins
> Of Shakespeare, the flowers, and the waterwheel (*al-dāliyah*).
> Wake up the poet of light, for sunrise
> Is threatened by a darkening cloud
> Under which Macbeth tried to hide,
> For he does murder sleep,
> The innocent sleep.[299]

Once more, the citation is integral to the poem's structure. The speaker implores, "Wake up the poet of light, for sunrise / Is threatened by a darkening cloud". Shakespeare's lines

[298] Conventionally, the final long syllable at the end of the line goes unpronounced in Arabic. I have indicated the separations between poetic feet with " / " here. The phrases are thus further linked by what the Arab rhetoricians call *tarṣīʿ* (roughly meaning "isocolon"), a device I discussed in the previous chapter.

[299] *Macbeth*, 2.2.35-36.

illustrate the darkness of night that threatens to descend throughout the poem in the destruction wrought by the merchant's trade, a poetic representation of the real threat of nuclear holocaust during the Cold War. Specifically, the quoted lines liken the merchant and the tyrants from before to Macbeth, quoting from *Macbeth* 2.2.35-36. "Methought I heard a voice cry, 'Sleep no more! / Macbeth does murder sleep'—the innocent sleep". Macbeth speaks these lines just after murdering King Duncan in the play. His troubled conscience conjures up the voice he hears not only because he killed Duncan while he slept, but also because in doing so Macbeth ensures that he himself will never sleep soundly again as long as he is king—that is, until he dies. The *Macbeth* lines quoted in the poem thus reiterate the criticism leveled against the merchant in section two, namely, that his greed and willingness to participate in the war economy can only end in personal tragedy: the death of his own children in the wars he has a hand in. Applying this motif to tyrants, the cited lines decry their willingness to sacrifice their own people for selfish reasons, which will ultimately lead to the end of their rule, whether due to popular revolution or military defeat.

In sections seven and eight, the poem is at its most universal and fits a model of mainstream Communist commitment. However, we can also locate undercurrents of a more local brand of commitment, focused not on advancing a Communist agenda but rather on the Arab and Iraqi nationalism that would occupy the poem's author during the final years of his life. Returning to section three, the merchant's cry rings out in the first line: "Iron," and the speaker asks,

> Who is all this iron for?
> For a chain twisting around a wrist
> A blade held to breast or vein
> A key to the prison door for those that are not slaves
> A noria that scoops blood.
> 'Bullets'

Who are all these bullets for?
For miserable Korean children
Hungry workers in Marseille
The people of Baghdad and the rest.

By moving between the local and the global, the poem links the individual experiences of oppression witnessed by its narrator in Iraq with those of other downtrodden people across the globe: children suffering during the Korean War (1950-1953), the working class in southern France, and the citizens of Baghdad. The merchant's iron will turn into shackles for prisoners, weapons for tormentors, and keys to lock up anyone who cannot be controlled otherwise. In these lines, the poem's explicit Communist inspiration emerges in an alternative mode of transnationalism-from-above—one driven and controlled by Communism's reliance on a flattening conception of human experience based solely in class consciousness that collapses together all groups bearing the burden of capitalism. The poem challenges this global view of class struggle by including imagery specific to local Iraqi life such as the noria, a type of waterwheel that has irrigated the fields of Iraq for centuries. For instance, the "noria that scoops blood" ("*nāʿūratun l-ightirāfi 'd-dam*") appears again in line 234, while "the norias whisper" in line 207. In a continuation of its overall theme, the poem here transforms the life-giving symbol of the noria into an implement of death and in so doing ties daily life in southern Iraq with the worldwide conflict between Communism and capitalism.

However, in the middle sections of the poem, optimism for the future remains grounded in the local. The speaker describes how the daily realities of war and war readiness have become commonplace.

My mind has gotten used to—like far off thunder—
The din of footsteps, the crash of stones,
And the flicker of lamps in the mine,
What oozes out of naked backs,
And tasting blood in a cough!

Our tongues are filled with iron dust,
Silence rings out where church-bells did…

Out of this apocalyptic scene, a glimmer of hope flashes in the southern Iraqi countryside.

The norias whisper, and the farmers too.
In every field—like life beating on—
Plows swing to and fro in the heart of the soil.
The villages build
Villages—their mud made from the tyrant's rotted corpse—
They make mortar from the tiniest pebbles,
And even the desert wastes give rise to
A city,
Another, and another, on and on!

While the majority of the imagery here could be used to describe most agrarian communities, the presence of the noria specifically calls to mind al-Sayyāb's birthplace along the banks of the Shaṭṭ al-ʿArab. The villages constructed with "mud made from the tyrant's rotted corpse" are the poetic parallel of the dwellings the southern Iraqi marsh Arabs have built out of mud and reeds for centuries.[300] The imagery of desert wastes giving rise to city after city extends beyond southern Iraq but remains an idealist vision of the development of Arab civilization against great odds. By locating hope for the future in a quintessentially local Iraqi scene, these lines complicate the overarching narrative of international Communist commitment in the poem.

[300] Michael Spencer, "The Marsh Arabs Revisited," *Saudi Aramco World* (March/April, 1982), 32-36. https://www.saudiaramcoworld.com/issue/198202/the.marsh.arabs.revisited.htm. The Marsh Arabs build their *muḍīf* houses by fixing pylons of *qaṣab* reeds in holes and trenches dug into the muddy banks of the marshes. The poem's imagery suggests a scene similar to that found in Khalīl Ḥāwī's "*al-Jisr*" ("The Bridge," *Dīwān Khalīl Ḥāwī* [Bayrūt: Dār al-ʿAwdah, 1972], 133-143), in which the speaker stretches out the bones of his own body to form a bridge to a better future for the children (i.e. the next generation), except in "Weapons and Children" the people build a new future over and out of the corpse of their former tormentor. They anchor the *qaṣab* that provides the foundation for their cities in the mud of the tyrant's body. Images of the internal and external structure of *muḍīf* dwellings can be found in Wilfred Thesiger's *The Marsh Arabs* (London: Collins, 1985), picture insets between 28 and 29, 108 and 109, 124 and 125, 188 and 189, and 204 and 205.

However, in the eighth and final section, the poem's perspective returns once more to the universal, in line with what we would expect in mainstream committed literature. The final lines are:

> Every holiday, the waterwheels (*wa-inna 'd-dawālība fī kulli ʿīd*)
> Are spurred on by the wind. Spirits lift up,
> We overcome the dark ages,
> Arriving at a world bathed in light
> (Bullets, bullets, bullets, bullets
> Old iron) …
> For a new existence!

An indication of the poem's return to a more global view, the waterwheels here are no longer the norias found in the earlier descriptions of local Iraqi imagery but *dawālīb*—another Arabic term for waterwheels, but one al-Sayyāb uses only rarely.[301] The poet reserves the word noria (*nāʿūrah*) to indicate a specifically Iraqi scene both in this poem and elsewhere.[302] The juxtaposition of the spinning waterwheels with the Arabic word for holiday (*ʿīd*), the root letters of which have to do with "return," gestures to the overall mythic cycle of death and rebirth as well.

The final line sums up the narrative of explicit commitment found throughout the poem, encapsulating the conflict between light and dark once more with light ultimately emerging as the champion. This last line recapitulates the death-rebirth cycle, formally representing the whole of the poem again by laying bare how life replaces death and death life. All the elements of the

[301] According to my knowledge, this is the only time al-Sayyāb uses the term *dawālīb* or its singular form, *dūlāb*, in his entire *dīwān*.

[302] For another example of the poet's use of the *nāʿūrah* to conjure up an image of Iraq, consider the final lines of his "*al-Mabghā*" ("The Whorehouse"): "So this is Baghdad? / Or has Gomorrah returned, so the return was / Death? But in the clinking of chains / I sense… what? The sound of a noria (*nāʿūrah*)? / Or the shout of sap in roots?" "Badr Shakir al-Sayyab: Whorehouse," Levi Thompson trans., *Jadaliyya*, 2 June 2014. http://www.jadaliyya.com/pages/index/17960/badr-shakir-al-sayyab_whorehouse.

poem are tied together metrically; the poem shows how all of its contents are interchangeable through its regular rhythm. The poem accomplishes this through a combination of rhetorical elements: *ṭibāq* (antithesis)[303] and *jināS* (or *tajnīs*, paronomasia).[304] To demonstrate, the final three lines are transliterated, "(*raṣāṣun raṣāṣun raṣāṣun raṣāṣ / ḥadīdun ʿatīq / li-kawnin jadīd*)". The quick repetition of the merchant's cry for bullets in the antepenultimate line continues into the penultimate one, "(Bullets bullets bullets bullets / Old iron)". These two lines are offset by parentheses from the last line of the poem, which includes the speaker's concluding optimistic hope for a future in which all the destruction wrought by bullets and iron will eventually lead to a new existence. "Iron" and "new" are linked by their metrical equivalence (each is ˘ ¯ ¯), as well as their paronomasia. The only difference between the two words is the lack of a dot on the *ḥāʾ* of *ḥadīd* (ح) and the presence of a dot indicating the *jīm* of *jadīd* (ج).[305] The final word of the poem, *jadīd* (new), opposes *ʿatīq* (old) in the previous line, and again the words share the same metrical pattern—a result of al-Sayyāb's reliance on the prosodic rhythms of Arabic free verse. The *ṭibāq* rhetorically symbolizes the final victory of the "world bathed in light" over the calls of the merchant by creating "a new existence" out of the ashes of the past.

Although "Weapons and Children" ends with lines directly addressing themselves to the global pacifist ideology of the Iraqi Peace Partisans and the Communists, the poem's mythical foundations and inclusion of Iraqi imagery reflect an internal tension between Communist political commitment and Iraqi nationalism. Having presented how this tension emerges with al-

[303] Heinrichs, "*Ṭibāḳ*," *EI2*.

[304] W.P. Heinrichs, "*Taḏjnīs,*" *EI2*. http://dx.doi.org/10.1163/1573-3912_islam_COM_1144.

[305] Specifically, this is called a *tajnīs muṣaḥḥaf*: paronomasia based on a difference in diacritical markings. Heinrichs, "*Taḏjnīs.*"

Sayyāb's references to Western literature in the poem, I now consider its publication history with regard to al-Sayyāb's biography.

Badr Shākir al-Sayyāb's Transnational Turn

"Weapons and Children's" modernist aesthetics implicitly work against its explicit narrative of commitment. Al-Sayyāb had a troubled relationship with Communism when he wrote and published "Weapons and Children." The poem certainly contains elements of Communist commitment, but its references to Western literature challenge the literary mode of socialist realism the ICP championed. Looking to al-Sayyāb's memories of his political involvement during the early 1950s, we can further explore how his proclivity for the avant-garde in Arabic and appreciation of Western literature came up against his Communist commitment.

During the 1952 *Intifāḍah* in Iraq, al-Sayyāb first witnessed the violent tactics he would later vilify the ICP for using, and his experiences during the uprising would ultimately transform his poetic vision and complicate his Communist beliefs. His disgust with what happened during the protests obviously influenced his recollections of his involvement with the Party. According to his own account, on 23 November, at the height of the *Intifāḍah*, protestors carried him through the streets as he recited poetry urging them on. His group marched west from the banks of the Tigris into the Bāb al-Shaykh neighborhood of Baghdad, coming under fire as they reached the ʿAbd al-Qādir al-Gīlānī Mosque. As a couple of participants tried to load the wounded into vehicles bound for the hospital, the rest of the protestors took off down an alley behind the mosque. One of them shouted that they should take the local police station by cutting across the mosque's graveyard, which they did. In al-Sayyāb's recounting, they lost their mettle

when gunfire "from only one or two rifles" rang out from the station as they approached. Enraged at not being able to continue, the crowd

> seized a poor, unfortunate fellow—one of their own countrymen—who was wearing a *kūfiyyah* dyed blue to indicate that he was a descendant of the Prophet. He also had two blue tattoos on his temples,[306] but when one of the comrades caught sight of him, he shouted 'He's with the Secret Police!'
>
> As punches and kicks rained down upon him he cried out for help. 'By God, I swear I'm not police!' he screamed. 'I'm just a poor man!'[307]

Al-Sayyāb never forgot what happened next. The crowd ended up killing the man, regaining its courage, and making for the police station once more. There, three or four men overcame one of the officers, killed him as well, and set fire to the building. A second officer made his escape, hiding in an abandoned house in the neighborhood. The protestors fanned out, searching every corner until they found him, at which point they stabbed him numerous times until he succumbed and, in a fit of rage, kept on stabbing him even after he was dead. Finally, they threw his body in the street, poured gasoline on it, and lit it ablaze.[308]

In his account of the events, al-Sayyāb expresses his sympathy for the victims of the crowd and his horror at what the protest devolved into, excoriating the Communists for their use of violence and blaming them for the actions of the protestors. It is impossible to know what

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[306] Indicating that he was from the poor peasant class of the countryside and thus almost certainly not a policeman at all. On tattooing in Iraq, see Winifred Smeaton, "Tattooing Among the Arabs of Iraq," *American Anthropologist* 39, no. 1 (Jan. - March, 1937): 53-61.

[307] Al-Sayyāb, *Kuntu shuyūʿiyyan*, 208.

[308] Al-Sayyāb's full account of the day's events is in *Kuntu shuyūʿiyyan*, 207-209. See also Jones, "The Poetics of Revolution," 254-255 and a different, longer translation of this passage in Elliott Colla, "Badr Shākir al-Sayyāb, Cold War Poet," *Middle Eastern Literatures* 18, no. 3 (2015), 253-254. Instead of "one or two rifles," Hanna Batatu reports that the protestors faced a "fierce fussilade" from the police, which "brought death to twelve of their comrades. With revenge in their heart, they seized a policeman, who had had no time to escape from the station, dragged him to the street, and burned him." *The Old Social Classes and the Revolutionary Movements of Iraq: A Study of Iraq's Old Landed and Commercial Classes and of its Communists, Baʿthists and Free Officers* (Princeton, NJ: Prince University Press, 1978), 669. The second police officer and the tattooed man go unmentioned in Batatu's records.

role, if any, al-Sayyāb actually had in stirring up the protesters' emotions or even in the taking of the police station, for the only source we have about what the poet did in Bāb al-Shaykh is his own memoir. Whatever happened that day, the events of 23 November 1952 represent the beginning of the end of al-Sayyāb's affiliation with the Iraqi Communists. Though he was appalled by the murderous actions of the crowd (at least when he wrote about it later on), his mere presence at the protest made him a target for the government in the aftermath. He had to flee the country.

Facing a possible death sentence for his involvement in the *Intifāḍah*, al-Sayyāb disguised himself as a bedouin and took the train to Basra. In Abū al-Khaṣīb, a group of relatives handed him over to some Iraqi smugglers who would sneak him into Iran. The first traces of al-Sayyāb's Arab chauvinism appear in his recollection of the escape years later. "It was dawn on a cold winter day," al-Sayyāb remembers, "when one of the smugglers woke me up in their house. I walked behind him until we reached a rivulet separating Iraq and Iran, which in actuality only separates two parts of a single Arab land that resemble each other in every way."[309]

His first sojourn in Iran extended from late November 1952 until January 1953, and he seems to have spent the whole time in Khurramshahr, roughly ten miles east of Jaykūr. Out of money but unable to return to Iraq, he made his way south to the port city of ʿAqabah on the Persian Gulf, waiting for the winds to turn so he could take a small sailboat to Kuwait[310] where he would spend the next six months.[311]

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[309] Al-Sayyāb, *Kuntu shuyūʿiyyan*, 211.

[310] Al-Sayyāb, *Kuntu shuyūʿiyyan*, 214.

[311] Both of al-Sayyāb's most well-known biographers cover his time in exile, but unfortunately each account lacks detailed dates or a thorough timeline. Cf. Bullāṭah, *Badr Shākir al-Sayyāb*, 67-73; ʿAbbās, *Badr Shākir al-Sayyāb*, 173-177.

Life in Kuwait was difficult for him. He took up residence with a group of comrades, some of whom were suffering from tuberculosis, which meant many of the daily chores like washing dishes, making tea, and going on errands fell to him. Though he had felt solidarity with the lower classes during his time at the Teachers College because of his humble beginnings in southern Iraq, while hiding out in Kuwait his affectations marked him as a member of the *effendi* class,[312] and his housemates considered him a *petit bourgeoise*.

In the narrative he tells about his eventual break with Communism, his account of the conflicts that emerged in the Kuwaiti safe-house clarifies his later opinions about the Communist position on literary commitment. He writes,

> There was a continual battle between me and them about what I read. If you wanted to read a story, then it had to be one by Maxim Gorky, Chekov, or Ilya Ehrenburg, or maybe those of the communists in Syria and Lebanon like [Muḥammad] Dakrūb, Ḥannā Mīnah, etc. If you wanted to read poetry, then you had to read Nâzım Hikmet, Pablo Neruda, and so on—Communist poets. The newspaper you were supposed to read was the Communist Lebanese paper *al-Thaqāfah al-waṭaniyyah* (*National Culture*), and our journal was *al-Ṭarīq* (*The Way*)—also Communist.

Once, he brought home a copy of D. H. Lawrence's *Lady Chatterley's Lover*, and, "upon seeing it, the comrades forbade me from reading it and took it away from me." The radio stayed tuned to Moscow.[313]

His broad literary interests, which ranged beyond Communist orthodoxy to include many Western writers, drew a line in the Kuwaiti sand between him and his housemates. In what would become a continual conflict throughout the latter part of his life, his affinity for Western

[312] That is, someone from the middle class: urban, urbane, and educated—only one of which al-Sayyāb truly was. See also Israel Gershoni and James P. Jankowski on the effendi class in Egypt, *Redefining the Egyptian nation, 1930-1945* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 7-12.

[313] Al-Sayyāb, *Kuntu shuyūʿiyyan*, 216-217.

literature made him a target for his hardline Communist brethren, though his own poetry often challenges the hegemony of European influence in Arabic literature. At the Communist safe-house in Kuwait, his taste for Western literature only exacerbated his feelings of estrangement from his homeland and his people.

Fed up with life in Kuwait, he returned to Iraq in May 1953 but found that conditions had not changed: there was still a warrant for his arrest, and the police had come to his father's house looking for him. Considering his situation, he decided to flee to Iran once again and make his way from there to Bucharest to attend that year's World Festival of Youth and Students. Although his Communist affiliation had been shaken during his time in Kuwait, he remained an active member of the party and sent the ICP a letter requesting support for his trip to Iran and onward to Bucharest. The local branch of the ICP in Abū al-Khaṣīb gave him a letter of introduction to present to the Tūdah, and he returned to Khurramshahr. There, he turned the letter over to a member of the Tūdah who contacted the Party Headquarters in Tehran to prepare for his journey out of the country and back.[314]

His biographers include no details about the trip to Bucharest. It appears that he did not actually attend the Festival, which was at that time a yearly event organized by the World Federation of Democratic Youth, an international leftist organization. Though the Festival was pro-Communist, in a report issued in 1970 Philip Altbach writes, "Observers note that many students did not take the events [at the Festival] themselves very seriously, but used the opportunity for making informal contacts and enjoying a 'free' vacation in a foreign country."[315]

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[314] Al-Sayyāb, *Kuntu shuyūʿiyyan*, 222.

[315] Philip G. Altbach, *THE STUDENT INTERNATIONALS: An Analysis of International and Regional Student Organizations*, Final Report, Project No. 6-E-146 (Madison, WI: U.S. Department of Health, Education and Welfare, Office of Education Bureau of Research, 1970), 80.

Because al-Sayyāb comments no further on the reasons he wanted to attend the Festival, we cannot know exactly what motivated him to try to go other than perhaps using the trip as an excuse to get the Tūdah to sponsor his attendance—preferable, in any case, to returning to Kuwait. The Festival took place from 2-14 August 1953, though it seems that he remained with his Tūdah contacts in Tehran for its duration.

While he was hiding out with the Tūdah north of Tehran, the American and British spy agencies removed from power Mohammad Mosaddegh, the Iranian Prime Minister elected in 1951 amid a wave of popular support. The coup happened on 19 August 1953. He witnessed its aftermath first-hand while making his way back to Tehran from the summer vacation destination Shimirān[316] with members of the Tūdah Party on 20 or 21 August. He found the streets filled with trucks carrying soldiers, whom he would later discover were supporters of the coup and not of Mosaddegh as he first believed. The next day in Tehran, he awoke to find a small group of fifty or sixty reactionaries taking control of the streets around where he was staying. Their number hardly compared to the crowds that had gone out in support of the Prime Minister only days before, and he wondered where their opposition was. The Party did not seem to be organizing any response at all. Perplexed, he asked his Tūdah companions why they were not trying to reverse the coup and calling for mass protests in the streets. One responded,

> 'Listen, Arab comrade. We're on the border of *Ittiḥād-i shūravī*'—that's what they called the Soviet Union.
>
> 'Sure,' I replied, 'I know that.'
>
> Then my interlocutor started talking again.
>
> 'So, if we take control of the government—us, the Communists—do you think the Americans will stay silent about it? Of course not! They'll intervene, and once they do, it will cause problems for the Soviet Union.'
>
> My blood boiled in my veins, and I screamed back at him, my voice charged with emotion, 'But you all are Iranians, not Soviets! Your job is to defend

[316] Shimirān also happens to be where Nīmā Yūshīj died.

> the interests of your own people, the Iranian people, not the Soviet Union and its people. Comrade, the Soviet Union is capable of defending itself!'[317]

This conversation represents the most important confrontation leading to al-Sayyāb's ultimate turn from Communism to Iraqi nationalism. After he witnessed the Tūdah defer to the Soviet Union's program of Communist transnationalism-from-above following the coup, his already fragile faith in Communist ideals was shattered. Ironically, after the Tūdah contacted "their Kaaba"—as he refers to Moscow in his retelling of the story—the Soviets said they would support the Tūdah in a move against the new government in Iran, which had by that point taken full control of the country. He ruminates on why he initially became a Communist after witnessing what happened in Iran, asking himself,

> Did I become a Communist because I wanted to defend the interests of a foreign nation and its people? No, I became a Communist out of love for my own people: my neighbors, those I know. I used to think that Communism was the best solution—no, the only solution to our problems […]. But now Communism seemed very different to me.[318]

Though al-Sayyāb's nationalism only reached fever pitch years later, his experience of the Tūdah Party's betrayal of the interests of the Iranian people after the coup against Mosaddegh marks a pivotal moment in his political development. Returning to his memories of that period in his life, he quotes al-Mutanabbī's poem about Persia and describes his thoughts and feelings when he first arrived in Iran.

> The abodes of [Bawwān] Valley are
> as pleasant as springtime,
> But an Arab man there is
> strange of face, hand, and tongue
>
> (*maghānī 'sh-shiʿbi ṭayyiban fi 'l-maghānī*
> *bi-manzilati 'r-rabīʿi mina 'z-zamāni*

[317] Al-Sayyāb, *Kuntu shuyūʿiyyan*, 15-16. Cf. Jones, "The Poetics of Revolution," 284-285.

[318] Al-Sayyāb, *Kuntu shuyūʿiyyan*, 17.

wa-lākinna 'l-fata 'l-ʿarabiyya fīhā
gharību 'l-wajhi wa-l-yadi wa-l-lisāni)

> Yes, I was strange of face, hand, and tongue in this Arab land [that is, across the Iran-Iraq border in Iran]. Long lost feelings of nationalism and Arabism rose up in my soul. I exulted in my Arabness. I swore to myself that I would never abandon or betray it just because a cold-hearted, dirty Jew who claimed to have embraced Christianity during the nineteenth century wrote a book called *Capital*—motivated by his hatred, jealousy, Jewish fanaticism, and what he read in the Torah. And after him came another Jew, from Russia, who revolted against the revolution of the bourgeoisie and established a rule in which man is but a tool: he neither thinks nor feels anything that is not in line with what the system forces upon him.[319]

While these sentiments are not an aberration in light of the rest of his memoir, their blatant racism and anti-Communism are almost surely an insertion, the memory tainted by his renunciation of Communism later in life.

As Iraq's fortunes changed following the withdrawal of direct British influence and the end of the monarchy in 1958, he became openly nationalist.[320] Notwithstanding his turn from

[319] Al-Sayyāb, *Kuntu shuyūʿiyyan*, 211. Elliott Colla's translation of parts of this passage in "Badr Shākir al-Sayyāb, Cold War Poet," 255-256. Cf. also Larkin's translation of the poetry, "Poetics of Cultural Identity," 395.

[320] This shift is most obvious in *Kuntu shuyūʿiyyan*, the series of reflections he wrote in the Baʿthist Iraqi newspaper *al-Ḥurriyyah* in 1959 (Jones, "Poetics of Revolution," 10). Al-Sayyāb claims that his support of the Baʿth was a rumor started by the Communists (*Kuntu shuyūʿiyyan*, 25). However, even if he did not ever explicitly support the Baʿth, his political positions matched those of the party by the end of his life, especially his support of Arab nationalism. Elliott Colla has pointed out how al-Sayyāb attempted to position himself as a Cold War public intellectual, explicitly aligning himself with Western Communist turncoats like Stephen Spender (d. 1995) and Ignazio Silone (d. 1978) in the pages of his memoir ("Badr Shākir al-Sayyāb, Cold War Poet"). Colla traces the courses of al-Sayyāb's disillusionment with Communism to when Iraqi Prime Minister ʿAbd al-Karīm Qāsim (d. 1963) rebuffed pan-Arabism after taking the reins of power. This coincided with Qāsim's enfranchisement of the ICP within his government, after which the Iraqi Communists became a central pillar of his rule at the expense of pan-Arabism. Colla further explains that al-Sayyāb's disenchantment with the ICP led him to begin using the terminology surrounding the premodern discourse of the *shuʿūbiyyah* movement (see H. T. Norris, "*Shuʿūbiyyah* in Arabic Literature," *Abbasid Belles Lettres*, Julia Ashtiany, T. M. Johnstone, J. D. Latham, R. M. Serjeant eds. [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990], 16-30) in casting the Iraqi Communists as anti-Arab foreign agents, a usage that later became a central feature of Baʿth Party ideology. Elliott Colla, "I Used to Be a Communist: Re-Reading Al-Sayyab's Memoir," paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the Middle East Studies Association, 25 November 2014 and Colla, "Badr Shākir al-Sayyāb, Cold War Poet."

Communism after the "bitter Iranian experience,"[321] the poetry he published upon his return to Iraq in 1954 marked a transitional phase between his period of outright commitment and that of his more ambivalent later verse. He was well aware of the discernible vein of Communist commitment in line with Soviet transnationalism-from-above in "Weapons and Children," and consequently tried to change how later readers would understand the poem by stripping away its explicitly Communist references and criticisms.

Iḥsān ʿAbbās, who had a copy of the first printing of the poem,[322] includes some of these lines in his biography on al-Sayyāb. We find the following lines in section four, "The merciless lords of Wall Street / Even turn the bed frame (*ḥadīda 's-sarīr*) / Into a sin […]."[323] Al-Sayyāb changed them in the 1960 version, deleting the reference to "the merciless lords of Wall Street" entirely. Then, later in the poem, he took out an extended description of the plight of African-Americans in Mississippi and their songs. ʿAbbās does not include the lines verbatim, though he does give the following from section seven: "And neither did fire lay low the neighborhood of the blacks / Nor did the pavement spit out blood there / Nor did criminal toughs sweep through it

[321] One of al-Sayyāb's biographers, Iḥsān ʿAbbās, refers to it as such. *Badr Shākir al-Sayyāb*, 179. However, al-Sayyāb himself informs readers of his memoir that he also "learned things about the art of love I hadn't known before this trip" while in Iran. *Kuntu shuyūʿiyyan*, 228. Although his experience of Tūdah politics was indeed bitter, al-Sayyāb seems to have sought out opportunities for intercultural exchange during his trip, starting with the book he carried with him, *How to Learn Persian in Ten Days* (which was written in English; DeYoung, *Placing the Poet*, 34) to the picnics he went on with Iranian friends and his appreciation of the Iranian celebration of "Constitution Day" in commemoration of the *mashrūṭiyyat*—the Constitution demanded by the founders of the modern Iranian state on 5 August 1906. *Kuntu shuyūʿiyyan*, 228-229. Al-Sayyāb learned some Persian, as he often quotes Persian in his memoir, using the Arabic *kāf* in place of the Persian *gāf* and the *bāʾ* in place of the *pi*. *Kuntu shuyūʿiyyan*, 14, 45, 212, 224, 226, 227.

[322] I have not been able to find a copy of the chapbook, but Dr. Naser al-Hujailan at King Saud University has made a PDF version that includes the deleted lines available on his faculty website: http://faculty.ksu.edu.sa/hujailan/417/%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%A3%D8%B3%D9%84%D8%AD%D8%A9%20%D9%88%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%A3%D8%B7%D9%81%D8%A7%D9%84.pdf.

[323] ʿAbbās, *Badr Shākir al-Sayyāb*, 187.

/ With the heavy ropes they drag / And fetter men's necks with."[324] ʿAbbās also quotes the following lines from section eight on the same subject that al-Sayyāb took out of the later edition. "For the daybreak of the slaves' release has dawned / And we have raised the banner of peace / We have raised it up, so let darkness be driven away!"[325] Finally, he changed "*salāmun ʿalā 'd-Dūn*" ("Peace to the Don" [a river south of Moscow]) to "*salāmun ʿalā 'l-Kunj*" ("Peace to the Ganges") in line 338, in yet another obvious attempt to disassociate the poem from its explicit support of Communist commitment. Whereas the earlier version's political meaning was rendered ambivalent by al-Sayyāb's willingness to engage with Communist pacifist ideology and intertextual references to Near Eastern myths and Western literature alike, these later emendations were made for solely political reasons after his total split with the ICP, which had taken up ʿAbd al-Wahhāb al-Bayātī as its champion during al-Sayyāb's absence in 1953.[326]

With the emendations al-Sayyāb made, a different type of transnationalism-from-above emerges to replace that of the Soviets he so loathed. By making these changes, he openly aligns himself with the West in opposition to the Eastern Bloc.[327] He even goes so far as to claim that the danger facing Iraq from Communism is no less than the danger posed by colonialism. "We are in a war of ideas (*ḥarb ʿaqāʾidiyyah*) with the Communists," he declares in 1959, adding a

[324] ʿAbbās, *Badr Shākir al-Sayyāb*, 191. ʿAbbās ruminates on the probable reasons behind the deletions for the remainder of the page. I agree with him that the deletions were not made for aesthetic reasons, though he gives more credence to the idea that al-Sayyāb made the changes at his publisher's urging than I think he ought to.

[325] ʿAbbās, *Badr Shākir al-Sayyāb*, 192.

[326] ʿAbbās, *Badr Shākir al-Sayyāb*, 220.

[327] With the exception of Yugoslavia, led by Josep Broz Tito (d. 1980), whom al-Sayyāb admired for his support of the domestic needs of his people over deference to Soviet policy. *Kuntu shuyūʿiyyan*, 91 and 242-245.

new religious rhetoric that only appeared in his poetry with "In the Arab Maghrib"[328] about the Algerian War of Independence (1954-1962). "We were certainly able," he continues,

> to deal with colonialism and its traitorous spies and agents, like Nūrī al-Saʿīd[329] and his gang, along with his treaties, such as the Baghdad Pact for example. We must escape the Communist nightmare and Communist control that plagues us. We are in a struggle (*jihād*) through which we defend our nationalism (*qawmiyyatanā*), our religion (*dīnanā*), our traditions (*taqālīdanā*), and our cultural heritage (*turāthanā*), through which we defend our independence and our being. O enemies of Communism, unite and join together, every group, every religion, and every nationality![330]

Al-Sayyāb's real experience of the Soviet Union's failure to support local nationalist movements against neo-colonial regimes exposed Communist ideology as an empty promise. However, instead of continuing to espouse his own deeply-held beliefs in global pacifism following his transnational turn, he became increasingly nationalist. In the end, he became an outright enemy of the Communists, both in Iraq and abroad.

Conclusion: After the Turn

Al-Sayyāb's nationalism exposed a number of repugnant political and social positions, and we must account for these in any consideration of his poetry. While I certainly do not think we should ignore his personal opinions in a total examination of his body of work, I do believe we can appreciate his poetry for its revolutionary combination of form and content without depending solely on historical and biographical analysis. Al-Sayyāb even suggests such an

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[328] First published in *al-Ādāb* (March 1956), 6-7. For an analysis of this poem, see "Rewriting the Metropolitan Text: Badr Shākir al-Sayyāb on 'Arab Decline,'" in Hussein N. Kadhim's *The Poetics of Anti-Colonialism in the Arabic* Qaṣīdah (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 2004), 131-172.

[329] The Prime Minister of Iraq during the British Mandate and after who was killed in ʿAbd al-Karīm Qāsim's 1958 coup.

[330] *Kuntu shuyūʿiyyan*, 82. Colla also offers a translation of this passage in "Badr Shākir al-Sayyāb, Cold War Poet," 250.

approach to the work of T.S. Eliot, one grounded in an aesthetic appreciation of the work itself in spite of the backwards and bigoted positions of the poet, whom the Arab critics labeled a reactionary and whose antisemitism is also well-known.[331] Just as he finds the more cutting critique of capitalism in Eliot's *The Waste Land* when comparing it to committed Communist poetry, we might also consider the salient critique of tyranny and violence that permeates "Weapons and Children" instead of the poet's later deference to Western capitalist ideology.

We must reformulate the model of transnationalism-from-above found in earlier studies of non-Western literature if we want to understand where a poem like "Weapons and Children" fits in al-Sayyāb's poetic development and that of Arabic modernist poetry more generally. In his case, the demands of Communist socialist realism were just as aesthetically limiting and ideologically imbricated in foreign interests as those of capitalism and global trade. By taking a page from his own interpretive book and considering his poetry with regard to its dynamic symbolic meaning, divorced from the unpleasant and at times outright hateful diatribes of its creator against non-Arabs and Jews,[332] we can counter the static, nationalist reading he attempted to place over his *œuvre* at the end of his career. Although he was a card-carrying Communist for many years, his political affiliations changed drastically after witnessing the inaction of the Iranian Tūdah party in the wake of Mosaddegh's ouster. Overall, his transnatonal experiences encouraged him to further incorporate ancient mythic themes into his poetry in opposition to explicit Communist political commitment, but they also led him to advocate for an unsavory

[331] Perhaps clearest in the Page-Barbour Lectures he gave as the University of Virginia in 1933. T.S. Eliot, *After strange gods; a primer of modern heresy* (London: Faber and Faber, [1934]).

[332] In *Kuntu shuyūʿiyyan*, al-Sayyāb associates the problems he finds in Communism with Karl Marx's Jewish ancestry (118-119, 211), praises the "true sons of Iraq" for their hatred of Jews (45), and depicts the Persians as usurpers of the areas of Iran populated by Arabic-speakers (211). Additionally, he bemoans the situation of Arabic in Iran, which he describes as "beginning to dwindle away" (*akhadhat taḍmaḥillu*; 212).

political ideology later on. We cannot ignore the problem of his eventual political positions. However, by looking to his poetry in terms of its mythic foundations and as part of a planetary modernist movement, we can keep it out of the quagmire of nationalism in which he hoped to leave it.

Chapter Four

Paths of Most Resistance: Aḥmad Shāmlū, Furūgh Farrukhzād, and the Poetics of Death

---

اکنون
این
منم!

Now
this
is me!

- Aḥmad Shāmlū, *The Manifesto*

و این منم
زنی تنها

And this is me
a woman alone[333]

- Furūgh Farrukhzād, "Let Us Believe in the Beginning of the Cold Season"

The above lines, from Aḥmad Shāmlū's *Qaṭ'nāmah* (*Manifesto*, 1951) and Furūgh Farrukhzād's "*Īmān biyāvarīm bih āghāz-i faṣl-i sard*" ("Let Us Believe in the Beginning of the Cold Season," 1965), resituate the lyric "I" at the center of Persian poetic modernism. While Nīmā's pioneering modernist poems in Chapter Two depended on figures presented in the third person who symbolized the poet, these two later modernists resuscitated the lyric "I" that had been so pivotal to the premodern tradition. Shāmlū wrote the *Manifesto* as a declaration of a newfound political commitment and an exploration of the revolutionary potential of death, finding new hope in the chief theme of the planetary modernist movement that also framed my discussion of al-Sayyāb's poem in the last chapter. Farrukhzād's poem, on the other hand, pushed Persian poetic modernism to its limits with its innovative use of prosody and in its ambivalent presentation of the same theme. Shāmlū's declaration of "*aknūn / īn / manam!*"

[333] The line literally means "a lonely woman." I prefer the cadence of "a woman alone" in my translation, though "a woman, lonely" would make a nice rhyme with the first line and match the original Persian word order.

("Now / this / is me!")[334] in the poem "*Surūd-i mardī kih khūdash rā kushtah ast*" ("Song of a Man Who Killed Himself") resonates in the first line of Furūgh Farrukhzād's "Let Us Believe in the Beginning of the Cold Season": "*va īn manam*" ("And this is me").[335] The "and" in Farrukhzād's line here indicates the continuation of a conversation Shāmlū began years before, one which Farrukhzād traces back through the tradition of Persian modernist poetry even as she creates a new poetic world for herself. Turning in this chapter to the constitutional role death plays in Persian modernist poetry, I look to Shāmlū's speaker's willingness to sacrifice himself to instigate change in the openly political *Manifesto*. With Farrukhzād, on the other hand, I argue that her final poem introduces a fully modernist outlook on the world to Persian poetry. I show how her lyric "I's" reflections on life and death make her the female counterpart to Baudelaire's *flâneur*, a modern Iranian *flâneuse*.

When we examine death's function in selections of these two poets' work, two distinctly different visions of death take shape. Shāmlū fashions death into a tool to be used for political change while Farrukhzād continues to work with the same conception of death found in Nīmā's poetry and remains ambivalent about the possibilities it offers. By taking up both Shāmlū's and

[334] Shāmlū, *Qaṭʿnāmah*, 4th ed. (Tihrān: Intishārāt-i Murvārīd, 1364 [1985]), 67. The collection was originally published in 1951.

[335] Furūgh Farrukhzād, *Īmān biyāvarīm bih āghāz-i faṣl-i sard*, 23. Cf. the translation in Hillman, *A Lonely Woman*, 125. The poem was first published in part in a fall 1965 issue of the journal *Ārash* but did not appear in a collection until the publication of a posthumous volume carrying the same name in 1974. While I depend on the version found in the 1989 edition, some scholars add a final (but incomplete) section. The theme of the additional section does not directly fit with the rest of the poem. For a facing-page translation and the Persian, see *Forugh Farrokhzad: Another Birth and other poems*, Hasan Javadi and Susan Salleé trans. (Washington, D. C.: Mage Publishers, 2010), 134-139. For the translations of the poem in this chapter, I have relied for the most part on the version just mentioned, making changes where necessary, and I have also consulted the other versions "Let Us Believe in the Oncoming Season of Cold," *Bride of Acacias: Selected Poems of Forugh Farrokhzad*, Jascha Kessler and Amin Banani trans., introduction by Amin Banani, afterword by Farzaneh Milani (Delmar, NY: Caravan Books, 1982), 95-102; a partial translation in Hillman, *A Lonely Woman*, 125-128; and "Let Us Believe in the Dawn of the Cold Season," *Sin: Selected Poems of Forugh Farrokhzad*, Sholeh Wolpé trans., foreword by Alicia Ostriker (Fayetteville, AR: The University of Arkansas Press, 2007), 85-93.

Farrukhzād's poetics of death, I show that they function as complementary examples of resistance to the status quo, though they do so in different ways. In their poetry, they both continue to develop the dynamic transnational poetic exchanges that lay behind the modernist Arabic, Persian, and European poetry I addressed in the first half of the dissertation, formal links between Arabic and Persian prosody and thematic links that permeated throughout the planetary modernist movement.

In the Persian critical tradition, Shāmlū and Farrukhzād are often considered as the two most important modernist poets to follow Nīmā for their pioneering styles, overall popularity, and fresh poetic sensibilities.[336] Both poets position death at the center of their poetics, and each remained indebted to the new mythic themes Nīmā introduced to Persian poetry along with his innovations on modernist poetic form. Shāmlū's poetics of death, however, is defined by his belief in death as a transformative step along the bloody path of revolution whereas Farrukhzād's approach to death denotes an ambiguous and ambivalent relationship between death and politics. In the limited selection of Shāmlū's early poetry I address here, death symbolizes hope, a gate to a new future. For Farrukhzād, on the other hand, death has an existential function as an undefined end that nevertheless defines life as it continuously approaches. While she cannot know death, she ruminates at length on what it might mean to die and, in turn, suggests to us what it might mean to actually live.

[336] For example, Riżā Barāhinī writes, "In the 1950s, a decade during which Iran suffered following the CIA coup, two poets had a fundamental importance. Despite the fact that Nīmā was still alive, despite the fact that Akhavān Sālis composed several of his best poems during the same period, the first of the two is Shāmlū and the other is Farrukhzād." "*Buzurgtarīn zan-i tārīkh-i Īrān*," *Kasī kih misl-i hīch kas nīst: darbārah-'i Furūgh Farrukhzād*, Pūrān Farrukhzād va Muḥammad Qāsimzādah (Tihrān: Kārvān, 1381 [2001]), 62. In comparing the two, I am following the lead of ʿAlī Sharīʿat Kāshānī, who wrote "*Furūgh va Shāmlū: az nazdīkī-hā tā fāṣilah-hā*," also in *Kasī kih misl-i hīch kas nīst*, 125-182.

The chapter first covers Shāmlū's move away from Romanticism to commitment in the early years of his poetic career. Drawing on Theodor Adorno's critique of fascist language in *The Jargon of Authenticity*,[337] I consider how the function of Shāmlū's lyric "I" changes following his political awakening during the early 1950s and after his readings and translations into Persian of the Spanish poet Federico García Lorca, whose ghost intertextually and transnationally haunts Shāmlū's *Manifesto*. I thus analyze Shāmlū's violent renunciation of his Romantic "I" and adoption of a committed poetic persona as the outcome of the poet's transnational engagement of the planetary modernist movement. Likewise, I take up Farrukhzād's project as the culmination of the modernist Persian poetic tradition and as a crucial representation of the transnational movements of planetary modernism. However, I contrast her insistence on the presence of the lyric "I" in her late poetry, which remains removed from direct political commentary, with Shāmlū's use of the "I". Furthermore, I investigate how she brings premodern Arabo-Persian *ʿarūḍ*/*ʿarūż* prosody to its final limits and probe her integration of themes found throughout the European modernist tradition and especially in the poetry of Charles Baudelaire and T.S. Eliot. Having explored the complementary yet opposed views of death in the poetry of Shāmlū and Farrukhzād, I conclude by analyzing Farrukhzād's late poetry in light of Adorno's theory of autonomous art. Because "Let Us Believe in the Beginning of the Cold Season" avoids explicit political commentary and by so doing gains its political meaning, I thus posit that "Let Us Believe in the Beginning of the Cold Season" is the finest example of poetic modernism in Persian and should be included in broader discussions of the planetary modernist canon.

[337] Theodor W. Adorno, *The Jargon of Authenticity*, Knut Tarnowski and Frederic Will trans. (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1973 [1964]).

Revolutionary Death in Aḥmad Shāmlū's Manifesto

In the previous chapter, we followed al-Sayyāb's move from Communist commitment to Iraqi nationalism. In Shāmlū's case, youthful experiments in Romanticism give way to committed writing following the poet's political awakening. In order to understand Shāmlū's move from Romanticism to commitment, I turn to Theodor Adorno's polemic against Martin Heidegger's philosophical project, *The Jargon of Authenticity*. By doing so, I hope to balance Heidegger's uncanny presence throughout this dissertation, an inevitable result of his philosophy's influence on existentialism and the concept of commitment as it was elaborated first in the French and later in both the Iranian and Arab modern philosophical traditions.[338] Notwithstanding the salience of Heidegger's philosophy in Arab and Iranian thought of the twentieth century, and especially his conception of death's role in fashioning an authentic life, we must also look to the theoretical alternatives offered by Theodor Adorno's trenchant criticism of Heidegger's philosophical project. They are, to my mind, a necessary rejoinder to Heidegger's often impenetrable and frequently dangerous rhetoric.

Aḥmad Shāmlū published his first collection of poetry, *Āhang-hā-yi farāmūsh shudah* (*Forgotten Songs*), in 1947[339] after a few years' dalliance with Fascism—or at least sympathizing with the Axis—due to a stint he did in an Allied prison during World War Two. The poems in

[338] For a sketch of Heideggerean philosophy's place in Arab existentialism, see Chapter Five of this dissertation. Heidegger's influence on Iranian thought has been thoroughly covered elsewhere. See, for instance, Mohammad Rafi, "Re-working the Philosophy of Martin Heidegger: Iran's Revolution of 1979 and its Quest for Cultural Authenticity," paper presented at the Seventh Annual Telos Conference, New York City, 15-17 February 2013. 19 April 2013, http://www.telospress.com/re-working-the-philosophy-of-martin-heidegger-irans-revolution-of-1979-and-its-quest-for-cultural-authenticity/; Alexander S. Duff, "Heidegger's Ghosts," *The American Interest*, 11:5 (25 February 2016), http://www.the-american-interest.com/2016/02/25/heideggers-ghosts/; and Ali Mirsepassi, *Transnationalism in Iranian Political Thought: The Life and Thought of Ahmad Fardid* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2017).

[339] 2nd ed. (Tihrān: Intishārāt-i Murvārīd, 1386 [2007]).

the collection were driven by a Romantic outlook on nature, emotive, and in many ways parallel to al-Sayyāb's early poems in traditional meters. Generally ignored as the product of youthful exuberance, this collection has been roundly dismissed by critics. Barāhinī, who focuses on Shāmlū's poetry after 1957's *Fresh Air* in his analyses, writes, "In 1947, Shāmlū published a book titled *Forgotten Songs*, which was fortunately quickly forgotten. This book might be the worst collection of poetry ever published."[340] Shāmlū also quickly wrote the collection off as a mistake.[341] Both Shāmlū and Barāhinī label *Forgotten Songs* as too Romantic, and their analysis is sound despite that in their brevity they fail to denounce the obvious Iranian jingoism in many of the poems.

After the eventual acceptance of Nīmā's innovations, Persian poetic modernism continued to gain in popularity during the 1950s and 1960s. Once the issue of literary commitment came to the fore, many Iranian poets began to write in the mode of socialist realism. In this new poetic environment, Shāmlū quickly came to renounce the Romantic poems he wrote in *Forgotten Songs* with the publication of his second collection, *Qaṭʿnāmah* (*Manifesto*), in 1951. Beyond the influence Nīmā's poetry had on Shāmlū's second collection,[342] the poet announced his new political commitment in paratextual comments as well as within the verse

[340] Riżā Barāhinī, *Ṭalā dar mis*, 318. In *Bā chirāgh va āyinah: dar justijū-i rīshah-hā-yi taḥavvul-i shiʿr-i muʿāṣir-i Īrān* (Tihrān: Sukhan, 1390 [2012]), Muḥammad Riżā Shafīʿī Kadkanī writes, "If we leave out the book *Forgotten Songs*, one would be hard-pressed to find clichéd poetry among [Shāmlū's] *œuvre*." 531.

[341] Shāmlū, *Qaṭʿnāmah*, 89.

[342] Muḥammad Jaʿfar Yāḥaqqī, *Jūybār-i laḥẓah-hā: jaryān-hā-yi adabiyyāt-i muʿāṣir-i Fārsī, naẓm va naṯr* (Tihrān: Jāmī, 1388 [2009/2010]), 61.

itself.[343] The speaker in *Manifesto* imprisons himself in the poems he composes and eventually goes so far as to kill the speaker of *Forgotten Songs*.

The *Manifesto* is a collection of action. The poems are, like those of *Forgotten Songs*, lyric—that is, spoken by a lyric "I."[344] Although the *Forgotten Songs* were also written in a lyric mode, the *Manifesto*'s lyric "I" recognizes what Adorno referred to—also in 1951—as a "dialectic of culture and barbarism"[345] and responds to it by ritually sacrificing itself instead of reveling in its individuality.[346] In other words, Shāmlū's lyric "I" in the *Manifesto* is not content to remain complicit with the crushing progress of modernity (produced through Enlightenment rationality) that results in the absolute reification of not only all parts of nature (the object) but also the mind (the subject). Instead, it admits to an historical and individual specificity (that of the poet Shāmlū) not usually found in lyric poetry and opposed to Enlightenment separation and categorization due to its interest in the collective rather than the self. The first two poems of the

[343] In an essay written in 2005 and appended to the 2007 edition of *Forgotten Songs*, Bihrūz Ṣāḥib Ikhtiyārī writes that Shāmlū's move away from Romanticism and Sentimentalism and towards Realism coincided with the entry of social feelings into his poetic sensibility. "*Az āghāz, pāyān rā mīdīd*," *Āhang-hā farāmūsh shudah*, 208.

[344] There are numerous critical works on lyric poetry. For my purposes, I start with the well-known understanding of the lyric "I" as T.S. Eliot explains it in *The Three Voices of Poetry* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1954). Eliot considers the lyrical mode of poetry to be best understood as "meditative verse," within which we hear "the voice of the poet talking to himself—or to nobody." 6. But we cannot ignore the role of the audience, as the lyric "I" "depends, in fact, on being heard by a 'you' *as* an 'I' speaking. The reason the lyric poet turns her back to the audience, without which she cannot exist, is that she *must* be heard. And she must first be heard by herself." Mutlu Konuk Blasing, *Lyric Poetry: The Pain and the Pleasure of Words* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2007), 30-31. Italics in original. For further discussion of some contradictions in Eliot's formulation, see William Waters, *Poetry's Touch: On Lyric Address* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2003), 18-20.

[345] Theodor Adorno, *Prisms*, Samuel Weber and Shierry Weber trans. (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1988 [1967]), 34. Nouri Gana further explains Adorno's opposition to writing poetry after Auschwitz when he writes, "by offering to represent the unrepresentable and nonsensical nature of military violence and ethnic cleansing, poetry, Adorno cautions us, risks making the unthinkable thinkable." "War, Poetry, Mourning: Darwish, Adonis, Iraq," *Public Culture* 22, no. 1 (2010), 34.

[346] In the end, the *Manifesto*'s blatant political commitment lands it squarely within the realm of committed art, despite its innovative formal features. Adorno would most likely put it alongside Brecht's didactic drama. See Adorno, "Commitment," 182-185.

Manifesto in particular foreground the position of the lyric "I" in order to contrast it with the lyric "I" of Shāmlū's first collection. The lyric "I's" of the two collections are not coeval and are rather diametrically opposed to each other despite their dual claims to be co-terminal with the poet. The lyric "I" of *Forgotten Songs* is content to regurgitate patriotic tropes to an idealized "You," whereas the lyric "I" of the *Manifesto* seeks to inscribe itself (and therefore also Shāmlū the poet) within the poem[347] as a representation of the historical reality of authoritarian repression under the Shah's regime and the real consequences Shāmlū might (and eventually did) face for composing politically committed poetry. The *Manifesto*'s lyric "I" proclaims its total devotion not to an amorphous addressee but to a real "You" located alternatively in either the struggling masses or in figures of revolutionary significance. The focus of this "I" is not its own experience but that of the collective "You."[348]

In the collection's first poem, "*Tā shikūfah-'i surkh-i yak pīrāhan*" ("Until the Red Blossom of a Shirt"—the title metaphorically evokes the image of blood blossoming across the chest of a bullet victim), the speaker offers a metaperspective on the act of writing poetry, particularly poetry that is politically committed.

Sang mīkasham bar dūsh,
sang-i alfāẓ
sang-i qavāfī rā.
Va az ʿaraqrīzān-i ghurūb, kih shab rā
dar gawd-i tārīkash
mīkunad bīdār,
va qīrandūd mīshavad rang
dar nābīnāʾī'i tābūt
va bī-nafas mīmānad āhang
az hirās-i infijār-i sukūt,

[347] I take the term "inscribe" from Blasing, who writes, "The interface of genre and history rhetorically positions the lyric speaker and allows the inscription of the 'I' in the poem to be read as a *self*-inscription." *Lyric Poetry*, 31. Italics in original.

[348] That is, instead of the singular Persian *tū* (you), Shāmlū uses the formal and/or plural *shumā* (you) in these poems, intending the plural.

man kār mīkunam
kār mīkunam
kār
va az sang-i alfāẓ
bar mīafrāzam
ustuvār
dīvār,
tā bām-i shiʿram rā bar ān naham
tā dar ān binshīnam
dar ān zindānī shavam…

I carry stones on my shoulders,
stones of words
stones of rhymes
and from the sweating sunset that awakens
night
in the pit of its darkness,
and becomes pitch black
in the blindness of a coffin
The song remains breathless
fearing an explosion of silence,
I work
and work
work
and from stones of words
I construct,
steady
a wall,
Until I build the roof of my poetry over it
Until I sit down inside it
and become a prisoner…[349]

In these lines, we first notice that Shāmlū's use of poetic form differs in comparison to Nīmā's. Although Nīmā was Shāmlū's primary poetic inspiration, Shāmlū had already begun moving beyond Nīmā's metrical innovations by 1950, when he wrote *Ruksānā* (*Roxana*), an experiment with "poetic-prose style," in which "line breaks and punctuation are neither predictable nor determined by the accusing expectations of those readers who would dismiss

[349] Shāmlū, *Qaṭʿnāmah*, 37-38.

them as non-poetic."[350] "Until the Red Blossom of a Shirt" similarly breaks with the regular predictability of Nīmāic metrics, instead depending more heavily on devices such as repetition and internal rhyme. For instance, *sang* (rock) appears four times in these lines and rhymes with *rang* and *āhang* at the end of lines seven and nine. The shared rhyme, spread across the beginnings and then ends of five lines, formally constructs a prison out of words.

The poem opens with a poet carrying stones of words and rhymes, the building blocks of a poem, on his shoulders. He not only constructs a poem with them but also the walls that will eventually entrap him. By imprisoning himself in his words, Shāmlū hopes to reignite language's (and also poetry's) revolutionary potential. Language is no longer a refuge for the poet, as Sartre would have it, but a prison. And trapping meanings in written or spoken words—the act of writing or speaking—can land a person in a real prison when those words are written or spoken against an autocratic political regime. In Fascism, language ceases to function freely, and, as Adorno puts it, "[l]anguage provides [Fascism] with a refuge. Within this refuge a smoldering evil expresses itself as though it were salvation."[351] Although Shāmlū employs a series of verbs in the first person as a rhythmic drumbeat at the end of six of the above lines (*mīkunam*, *mīkunam*, *mīafrāzam*, *naham*, *binshīnam*, *shavam*), he here gives up his Romanticism (and vehemently renounces his brief flirtation with Fascism) in favor of a stripped down, direct language. He eschews the emotive language used in *Forgotten Songs*. The *Qaṭʿnāmah*'s openly political poetry and the lyric "I's" announcement of its revolutionary presence within it eventually led to another prison term for Shāmlū, this time under the Shah. Instead of being

[350] Firoozeh Papan-Matin, *The Love Poems of Ahmad Shamlu*, Firoozeh Papan-Matin and Arthur E. Lane trans. (Bethesda, MD: Ibex Publishers, 2005), 26-27.

[351] Adorno, *Jargon of Authenticity*, 5.

imprisoned for distributing materials agitating against the Allies, he returned to prison for speaking out against the Pahlavi monarchy in favor of the Iranian masses.

Shāmlū's attention to the plight of the oppressed in the *Manifesto* extends transnationally beyond the borders of Iran as well. He dedicates its third poem, "*Surūd-i buzurg*" ("The Grand Anthem"), to one Shen-Cho, "an unknown Korean comrade."[352] Written on 6 July 1951, the poem addresses Shen-Cho as the speaker's *barādarak* (little brother) who is fighting against the United States and United Kingdom in the Korean War. The poem begins by immediately calling out to Shen-Cho, and the speaker (the lyric "I") only introduces himself in the eighth line. Throughout the poem, the speaker exhorts Shen-Cho to fight imperialism. In the final stanza, the speaker encourages him to sing an anthem for the victims of Fascism, connecting Nazi atrocities with the contemporary experience of war in Korea.[353] Also taking Marxist resistance against the authoritarian state in Iran as its subject, the fourth poem, "*Qaṣīdah barā-yi insān-i māh-i Bahman*" ("Ode for the Man of the Month of Bahman"), celebrates the memory of Taqī Arānī (d. 1940), a member of the group of fifty-three Communists arrested by the Shah's government in 1937.[354] Arānī was murdered in prison, and Shāmlū's poem presents the bodily sacrifice Arānī made as a revolutionary "gate" for others to pass through.

Va sūrākh-i har gulūlah bar har paykar
darvāzah'īst kih sih nafar ṣad nafar hazār nafar
kih sīṣad hazār nafar
az ān mīguz̲arand
rū bih burj-i zumurrud-i fardā.

And each bullet hole in each body

[352] Shāmlū, *Qaṭʿnāmah*, 69.

[353] Shāmlū, *Qaṭʿnāmah*, 69-75.

[354] Dabashi and Dahdel translate a section of the poem in "Ahmad Shamlu and the Contingency of Our Future," *Intellectual Trends in Twentieth-Century Iran*, 75-76. The Persian is found in Shāmlū, *Qaṭʿnāmah*, 77-88.

Is a gate which three people, a hundred people, a thousand people
which three hundred thousand people
Pass through
Going to the emerald tower of tomorrow.[355]

In this fourth poem, the lyric "I" also recedes into the background as it praises Arānī's heroism, only appearing once throughout the entire poem. The poem links the holes in Arānī's body to the people his sacrifice will eventually free through the repeated rhyme of *paykar* (body) and *nafar* (people) which appears four times in ever-growing number: "three people, a hundred people, a thousand people / […] three hundred thousand people."

In the first two poems of the collection, "Until the Red Blossom of a Shirt" and "Song of a Man Who Killed Himself," however, Shāmlū's lyric "I" is the axis around which the poems rotate. The first extends Shāmlū's calls for political commitment by employing poetic metaphors similar to those found in *Manifesto*'s other poems. In it, the lyric "I" contrasts its willingness to trap itself within its poetic language with the obedience of another, amorphous *shumā* (the Persian plural for "you") to the established ruling order within Iran.

Va nah bi-sān-i shumā
kih dastah-'i shalāq-i duzhkhīmtān rā mītarāshīd
az ustukhvān-i barādartān
va rishtah-'i tāziyānah-'i jallādtān rā mībāfīd
az gīsuvān-i khvāharān
va nigīn bih dastah-'i shalāq-i khūdkāmigān mīnishānīd
az dandān-hā-yi shikastah-'i pidartān!

[I am] not like you
who shape the handle of your hangman's whip
from you brothers' bones
who weave the threads of your executioner's lash
from your sisters' tresses
who set your fathers' broken teeth
like gems in the dictators' whip.[356]

[355] Shāmlū, *Qaṭʿnāmah*, 82-83.

[356] Shāmlū, *Qaṭʿnāmah*, 39.

In these lines, the speaker accuses unnamed sycophants of turning people into things: bones into whip handles; tresses of hair into a lash; and teeth into gems. Discussing the Enlightenment's drive toward categorization and the use of bureaucratic language that engender Fascism, Adorno explains that bureaucratic administration leads to the loss of humanity:

> The reciprocity of the personal and apersonal in the jargon; the apparent humanization of the thingly; *the actual turning of man into a thing*: all this is the luminous copy of that administrative situation in which both abstract justice and objective procedural orders appear under the guise of face-to-face decisions.[357]

In the verses cited above, Shāmlū lashes out against the reification of human beings under an authoritarian regime in a move that poetically encapsulates the problems Adorno locates in administrative language. The speaker in "Until the Red Blossom of a Shirt" is willing to sacrifice himself by imprisoning his thoughts in words, words that might indeed lead him back into a jail cell. In the case of their author, this is exactly what happened when Shāmlū was arrested in the aftermath of the 1953 coup against Mosaddegh.[358]

Shāmlū does not shy away from what he sees as his responsibility to speak honestly with his audience and in the face of power, whether that of the neocolonial West or the oppressive regime of the Shah. The speaker of "Until the Red Blossom of a Shirt" proclaims his devotion to speaking for the sake of others, a collective *shumā* distinct from the *shumā* that allows people to be fashioned into things.

> *Chunīnam man*
> *—zindānī'i dīvār-hā-yi khūshāhang-i alfāẓ-i bīzabān—.*
> *Chunīnam man!*
> *Taṣvīram rā dar qābish maḥbūs kardah-am*

[357] Adorno, *Jargon of Authenticity*, 83. Italics added.

[358] Sadiq Saba, "Obituary: Ahmad Shamlu," *The Guardian*, 28 July 2000, https://www.theguardian.com/news/2000/jul/28/guardianobituaries.books and Papan-Matin, *The Love Poems of Ahmad Shamlu*, 33.

va nāmam rā dar shiʿram
va pāyam rā dar zanjīr-i zanam
va fardāyam rā dar khvīshtan-i farzandam
va dilam rā dar chang-i shumā…
dar chang-i hamtalāshī bā shumā
kih khūn-i garmtān rā
bih sarbāzān-i jūkhah-'i iʿdām
mīnūshānīd
kih az sarmā mīlarzand
va nigāhshān
injimād-i yak ḥamāqat ast.
Shumā
kih dar talāsh-i shikastan-i dīvār-hā-yi dakhmah-'i aknūn-i khvīshīd
va takyah mīdahīd az sar-i iṭmīnān
bar āranj
majrā'i ʿāj-i jamjamahtān rā
va-z darīchah-'i ranj
chashmandāz-i ṭaʿm-i kākh-i rawshan-i fardātān rā
dar maz̲āq-i ḥamāsah-'i talāshtān mazmazah mīkunīd.
Shumā…
va man…
shumā va man
va nah ān dīgarān kih mīsāzand
dashnah
barā-yi jigarshān
zindān
barā-yi paykarshān
rishtah
barā-yi gardanshān.
Va nah ān dīgartarān
kih kūrah-'i duzhkhīm-i shumā rā mītābānand
bā haymah-'i bāgh-i man
va nān-i jallād-i marā birishtah mīkunand
dar khākistar-i zād u rūd-i shumā.

That's how I am
—a prisoner in walls made from melodies and mute words—
That's how I am!
I have imprisoned my image in its frame
My name in my poetry
My foot in the chain of my wife
My tomorrow in my offspring
My heart in your grip…
Hand in hand with you
you whose warm blood
you give to the soldiers

of the death squad who are trembling from the cold
to drink,
their gaze
foolish frozen.
You
Who are struggling to break the walls of the crypt of your present moment
Through your confidence, you support
on elbow
the flow of your ivory skulls
and from the valve of pain
get a taste of your tomorrow's bright palace
with a bite of your struggle's epic.
You…
And I…
You and I
Not those other ones who build
a dagger
for their [own] liver
a prison
for their bodies
a rope
for their necks
Not those yet more alienated ones
who light up the furnace of your hangman
with the firewood of my garden
and bake the bread of my executioner
in the ashes of your children.[359]

A series of lines with verbs in the first person opens this section: *chunīnam man*, *kardah-am*, etc., again limning the presence of the speaker. However, at the end of the line *va dilam rā dar chang-i shumā*... ("My heart in your grip…"), "*shumā*" ("you") immediately takes over as the speaker's focus. The speaker looks to "your struggle's epic," connecting his own revolutionary vision with *shumā* and against "those who build / a dagger / for their [own] liver / a prison / for their bodies / a rope / for their necks," and so on. Through his employment of pronouns, the speaker here links himself and a collective "you" against unnamed "other ones"

[359] Shāmlū, *Qaṭʿnāmah*, 42-44.

("*ān dīgarān*"; "*ān dīgartarān*") who allow and therefore ensure the continuation of authoritarian power.

In the second poem of the *Manifesto*, "Song of a Man Who Killed Himself," Shāmlū's newfound commitment overflows in a violent renunciation of the Romanticism of *Forgotten Songs*. If we consider "Until the Red Blossom of a Shirt" to be Shāmlū's declaration of commitment to a collective *shumā* (you), then "Song of a Man Who Killed Himself" represents the poet's following through with his promise, his sacrifice of the lyric "I" for its betrayals and dedication of his poetry to revolutionary change. This second poem begins,

> *Nah ābish dādam*
> *nah duʿāʾī khvāndam*
> *khanjar bih gulūyash nahādam*
> *va dar iḥtiżārī-'i ṭūlānī*
> *ū rā kushtam*
>
> *bih ū guftam:*
> "*—bih zabān-i dushman sukhan mīgūʾī*!"
> *va ū rā*
> *kushtam*![360]
>
> I gave him no chance
> I said no prayer
> I put a knife to his throat
> and in prolonged agony
> I killed him.
>
> I told him,
> "You speak the enemy's language!"
> And I
> killed him.

The unnamed "him" (*ū rā*) is the man (*mard*) from the poem's title. In the following stanza, it becomes obvious exactly who this mysterious man speaking the enemy's language is: the speaker of *Forgotten Songs*.

[360] Shāmlū, *Qaṭʿnāmah*, 57.

Nām-i marā dāsht
va hīch kas hamchanū bih man nazdīk nabūd,
va marā bīgānah kard
bā shumā
bā shumā kih ḥasrat-i nān
pā mīkūbad dar har rag-i bītābtān

va marā bīgānah kard
bā khvīshtanam

He had my name
no one was closer to me than him,
and he alienated me
from you
from you whose yearning for bread
beats in every one of your impatient veins.

He alienated me
from myself[361]

In these lines, the speaker declares his disillusionment with the Romantic lyric "I," which alienates the experience of the individual "I" from that of the collective "you" to whom the now-committed speaker intends to dedicate his life. The Romantic "I" attempts to subsume the experience of the collective within itself, but in doing so it discounts the heterogeneous voices that exist within the collective. The experience of the individual cannot stand in for all those of the collective. Shāmlū allows the lyric "I" of *Forgotten Songs* to speak in "Song of a Man Who Killed Himself" so that the speaker's "I" can respond to him and expose how misguided he had been to appeal to his own jargon of authenticity.

Bih man guft ū: "—larzishī bāshīm dar parcham,
parcham-i niẓāmī-hā-yi Urūmiyyah!"
Bidū guftam man: "—Nah!
khanjarī bāshīm
bar ḥanjarahshān!"

"We are but ripples in a flag," he told me,

[361] Shāmlū, *Qaṭʿnāmah*, 58.

"the Urmian[362] soldiers' flag."
"No," I replied.
"We are a knife
in their throat!"[363]

The Romantic "I" takes refuge in the nationalist symbol of a flag waving in the wind, an image the committed poet rends to shreds. Adorno again offers us a way to understand why Shāmlū violently rejects his previous Romantic self when he writes, "In lyric poetry, as in philosophy, the jargon acquires its defining character by the way it imputes the truth. […] The expression is sufficient unto itself. It discards as an annoyance the obligation to express a thing other than itself."[364] In these lines, Shāmlū specifically references the Romantic nationalism found in many of the poems he wrote in *Forgotten Songs*. Two in particular stand out here: "The Anthem of the Parthian Spearmen" ("*Surūd-i nīzahdārān-i 'Pārt'*"), dedicated to the Riżāʾian Youth[365] and "Flag-bearer!" ("*Parchamdār*!"), dedicated to a patriotic soldier led by Brigadier General Zanganah who resisted the Allied Forces (that is, the Soviets) in Urmia at the end of

[362] Urmia (Persian Urūmiyyah) is a city in far northwestern Iran where Shāmlū spent time as a teenager during the turbulent final years of World War Two. After being held in an Allied prison, Shāmlū and his father were arrested in Urmia during the time of the Azerbaijan People's Government, which separated from Iran for a year from December 1945 - December 1946. Sentenced to death, "[t]hey were left waiting for execution in front of a firing squad for hours before being freed." Sadiq Saba, "Obituary: Ahmad Shamlu"; see also 2:30-2:45 of Voice of America's Last Page episode "*Aḥmad Shāmlū rā bihtar bishināsīm,*" YouTube video, 35:47, posted by "VOA Last Page," 28 July 2013, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ho4ilBUWvOI. The speaker's outburst in these lines could easily be considered a delayed reaction to Shāmlū's experiences as a young man in Urmia, where he openly opposed the occupying Allied Forces. Ikhtiyārī, "*Az āghāz, pāyān rā mīdīd*," *Āhang-hā farāmūsh shudah*, 209. For more about the separatist movement in Azerbaijan, see Lousie L'Estrange Fawcett, *Iran and the Cold War: The Azerbaijan Crisis of 1946* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1992), especially Chapter Three, "The year of crisis: 1946," 53-82. Shāmlū's life experience was shaped by Cold War politics just as al-Sayyāb's was, but his trajectory was exactly opposite: from anti-Allies activity during World War Two to affiliation with the Tūdah (until the 1953 coup) and leftist sympathizing after the coup. Al-Sayyāb, on the other hand, shifted from outright membership in the Iraqi Communist Party to uncompromising Arab Iraqi nationalism.

[363] Shāmlū, *Qaṭʿnāmah*, 61.

[364] Adorno, *Jargon of Authenticity*, 85.

[365] Riżāʾiyyah being another name for Urmia deriving from Riżā Shāh's name.

World War Two. Consider these lines from the second poem and how they fit Adorno's definition of jargon as imputation of truth.

> *Āhāy, parchamdār! Rafīq-i man!* […]
> *Iftikhār kun, iftikhār… tū yak tārīkh chand hazār sālah rā dar dast dārī.*
> *Tū ḥāmil-i parchamī-'i hastī kih mā barā-yi surkhī-'i ān khūn-hā rīkhtah-īm* […].
>
> Ahoy, Flag-bearer! My comrade!
> Be proud, proud… you have thousands of years of history in your hands.
> You are carrying a flag of existence the red of which we spilled our blood for.[366]

In the *Manifesto*, Shāmlū responds to the blind nationalism found in his *Forgotten Songs* with a simple, direct language that calls its reader to social engagement and lashes out against the Romantic lyric "I" who ignores the collective in favor of individual experience.

In "Song of a Man Who Killed Himself" Shāmlu goes so far as to murder the lyric poet from *Forgotten Songs* in his fight against the notion that poetry should exist only as an end in itself, against its becoming lost in the jargon of authenticity. Estranged from his earlier poetry and awakened by his newly-found political commitment, Shāmlū rails against his earlier Romantic collection, calling it out by name.

> *Āhangī-'i farāmūsh shudah rā tanbūshah-'i gulūyash qarqarah kard*
> *va dar iḥtiżārī-'i ṭūlānī*
> *shud sard*
> *va khūnī az gulūyash chakīd*
> *bih zamīn*,
> *yak qaṭrah*
> *hamīn*!
>
> *Khūn-i āhang-hā-yi farāmūsh shudah*
> *nah khūn-i "Nah!"*
>
> He cooed a forgotten song in his windpipe
> and in prolonged agony
> went cold
> and blood dripped from his throat
> to the ground,

[366] Shāmlū, *Āhang-hā farāmūsh shudah*, 165-168.

one drop
after another!

The blood of forgotten songs
not the blood of "No!"[367]

Throughout the poem, Shāmlū returns to the scene of this murder-suicide, metaphorically shoveling dirt into the grave to bury his Romantic predecessor and his poetry in the past. The speaker also intimates Shāmlū's poetic and political awakening after reading the work of Federico García Lorca (d. 1936) and includes the scene of the Spanish poet's death at the hands of Franco's fascist forces at the beginning of the Spanish Civil War (1936-1939).

Frānkū rā nishān dādam
va tābūt-i Lūrkā rā
va khūn-i tantūr-i ū rā bar zakhm-i maydān-i gāv bāzī.
Va ū bih ruʾyā-yi khūd shudah būd
va bih āhangī mīkhvānad kih dīgar hīchgāh
bih khāṭirah-am bāz nayāmad.
Ān vaqt, nāgahān khāmūsh mānad
chirā kih az bīgānagī'i ṣadā-yi khūd
kih ṭanīnash bih ṣadā-yi zanjīr-i bardagān mīmānast
bih shakk uftādah būd.
Va man dar sukūt
ū rā kushtam.
Ābish nadādah, duʿāʾī nakhvāndah
khanjarī bih gulūyash nahādam
va dar iḥtiżārī-'i ṭūlānī
ū rā kushtam
—khūdam rā—
va dar āhang-i farāmūsh shudah-ash
kafanash kardam,
dar zīr zamīn-i khāṭirah-am
dafnash kardam.

I showed him Franco,
Lorca's grave,
and the blood of his iodine in the wound from the bullring[368]

[367] Shāmlū, *Qaṭʿnāmah*, 59.

[368] Shāmlū paraphrases a line from Lorca's "Lament for the Death of Ignacio Sánchez Mejías" ("*Llanto por la muerte de Ignacio Sánchez Mejías*"), which goes "*cuando la plaza se cubrió de yodo*" ("when iodine covered the

He went into his own dream
and sang a song that will no longer
come to my mind.
He went silent suddenly
alienated from his own voice
still echoing the sounds of slaves' chains
he fell into doubt.
And I silently
killed him.
I gave no chance, said no prayer
I put the knife to his throat
and in drawn out agony
I killed him
—myself—
And I shrouded him in his forgotten song.
In the basement of my memory,
I buried him.[369]

In these lines, the speaker appeals to the memory of Lorca's death to highlight the errors of Shāmlū's first collection, which depended on a rhetoric of authenticity that bordered on nationalist propaganda if it was not in outright support of Fascist ideology. Shāmlū's engagement with Lorca's poetry has been well-documented,[370] and he even produced a number of translations of Lorca's poetry into Persian.[371] Shāmlū's readings of Lorca had a profound impact on the

ring"). For the Spanish, see Federico García Lorca, *Selected Poems*, Martin Sorrell trans., introduction and notes by D. Gareth Walters, Oxford World's Classics (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 156; a translation is on 157. For more information about the events that led to Lorca's composition of the poem, see "The Death of a Bullfighter," in Ian Gibson, *Federico García Lorca: A Life* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1989), 387-391.

[369] Shāmlū, *Qaṭʿnāmah*, 62-63.

[370] Sadiq Saba, "Obituary: Ahmad Shamlu"; Firoozeh Papan-Matin, *The Love Poems of Ahmad Shamlu,* 30.

[371] For example, see Federico García Lorca, *ʿArūsī'i khun: namāyishnāmah dar sih pardah va haft majlis*, tarjamah-'i Aḥmad Shāmlū (Tihrān: Intishārāt-i Tūs, 1356 [1978]); Federico García Lorca, *Tarānah-'i sharqī va ashʿār-i dīgar*, tarjamah-'i Aḥmad Shāmlū ([Sweden]: Havādarān-i Sāzmān-i Vaḥdat-i Kumūnīstī dar Sūʾīd, [198?]); Federico García Lorca, *Sih namāyishnāmah az Lūrkā: ʿArūsī-i khūn, Yirmā, Khanah-'i Birnardā Ālbā*, tarjamah-'i Aḥmad Shāmlū, chāp-i 2 ([Tihrān]: Nashr-i Chashmah, 1382 [2003]); and *Fidirikū Kārsiyā Lūrkā*, compact disc, tarjamah va ṣidā-yi Aḥmad Shāmlū (n.d.; Tihrān: Muʾassasah-'i Intishārātī-'i Farhangī Hunarī-'i Ibtikār). There is even an audio recording of Shāmlū reciting his Persian translation of Lorca's "Romance sonámbulo" available on YouTube. "Federico García Lorca-Ahmad Shamlou," YouTube video, 6:22, posted by "Canal de Bijanfazli," 21 February 2012, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6t-TKIGfr5Y.

development of his verse as well as modern Persian poetry more broadly, and the transnational movement of Lorca's poetry following Shāmlū's reception of his work is evident in the lines quoted above.[372]

By selecting to paraphrase a line from "Lament for the Death of Ignacio Sánchez Mejías," Shāmlū perceptively attests to the importance of the poem within Lorca's vast body of work and shows himself to be particularly attentive to, and moreover a tireless advocate of, the transnational movements of literature during the early twentieth century.[373] Lorca wrote "Lament" in 1934 following the death of his friend in the bullring. Even before the fight started, "Lorca knew intuitively that the matador would be killed. When it proved true he told a friend: 'Ignacio's death is like mine, the trial run for mine.' The matador, he commented, 'did everything he could to escape from his death, but everything he did only helped to tighten the strings of the net.'"[374] Not long after, in 1936, Fascist rebels would assassinate Lorca in Granada.[375] Shāmlū uses Lorca's biography and poetry to give new life to his memory in a foreign poetic tradition in which he might have otherwise remained unknown. He creates a

[372] Hamid Dabashi, *Iran without Borders: Towards a Critique of the Postcolonial Nation* (New York: Verso, 2016), 93. "Shamlou, the Iranian national poet laureate," Dabashi adds, "was *entirely beholden* to Lorca […]." 94. Italics added.

[373] The paraphrase is indeed an early example of Shāmlū's participation in what Dabashi has recently termed "[a] transnational revolutionary public sphere" that existed (and continues to exist) in Iran. "As is perhaps best exemplified by Lorca," Dabashi adds, " […] a defiant combination of lyricism and politics informed the poetics of this global pantheon of iconoclastic poets [which includes Pablo Neruda, Nâzım Hikmet, Maḥmūd Darwīsh, and Langston Hughes]. In his own Persian poetry, Ahmad Shamlou, the most widely celebrated poet of his time, evocatively represented the universal pantheon, achieving a poetic diction with a cosmic certainty." *Iran without Borders*, 93

[374] Allen Josephs, "The Blood of a Genius," *The New York Times Book Review*, 8 October 1989. http://www.nytimes.com/1989/10/08/books/the-blood-of-a-genius.html?pagewanted=all.

[375] Gibson, *Federico García Lorca*, 446-470.

poetic parallel between Lorca's grief for his dead friend and his speaker's coming to terms with a new political commitment by "murdering" his past self.

The poetic scene in which the lyric "I" presents Shāmlū's previous poetic self with Lorca's grave parallels Shāmlū's encounter with Lorca's work and the transformation it caused in his poetry. The moment of reflection sends the old speaker "into his own dream," where he "sang a song that will no longer / come to my mind," that is, the now truly *Forgotten Songs*. After seeing Lorca's grave, Shāmlū's earlier self "went silent" and "fell into doubt." Unable to continue after its encounter with Lorca's poetry and biography, the old, alienating lyric "I" is killed, transformed, and reborn as a committed poet.

Shāmlū's intertextual reference to Lorca's poem uses the memory of the poet's death (I showed him […] / Lorca's grave) to reveal the folly of *Forgotten Songs* to the lyric "I" of the earlier collection. It is as if Shāmlū calls his old "I" to admit its complicity in its author's political naïveté so as to weaken and eventually kill it in favor of a new, politically committed poetic self. The poem of this new "I" thus exposes the senseless violence inherent to Fascism and the *Forgotten Songs*' complicity with said violence due to its blind nationalism. The poem then brings together Lorca's "Lament" for his friend ("and the blood of his iodine in the wound from the bullring") with Lorca's premonition of his own death. In fact, Shāmlū's poem does not mention Ignacio Sánchez Mejías, and the reader is left with an image of Lorca being the one who is wounded in the bullring instead of the matador. By describing the wounded poet as well as his grave, Shāmlū's poem gestures also to the ultimate sacrifice its lyric "I" is willing to make in realizing his new political commitment, its readiness to efface itself in favor of its audience as readers.[376]

[376] Shāmlū's new lyric "I" considers its predecessor a sign of its author's (previous and misguided) intention, a

Having moved through the transitional moment of self-realization that followed his encounter with Lorca's poetry and death, the speaker specifically announces for the first time that the man he has killed is indeed an earlier version of himself ("I killed him / —myself—" ["*ū rā kushtam / —khūdam rā*"]). With his past self now dead and buried, the speaker asseverates his rebirth.

Ū murd
murd
murd…
Va aknūn
īn manam
parastandah'-i shumā
ay khudāvandān-i asāṭīr-i man!

He is dead
dead
dead…
And now
This is me
Your worshiper
O Gods of my myths![377]

The speaker turns to the collective "you" (*shumā*), declaring himself to be the "worshiper" (*parastandah*) of *shumā*, whom he further describes as the "Gods of my myths" (*khudāvandān-i asāṭīr-i man*). Instead of declaring allegiance to God, country, or self—a declaration we find in the *Forgotten Songs* and Romantic poetry more generally[378]—Shāmlū's

blemish that the committed "I" must remove in order to fully come into its own. We might consider Shāmlū's repudiation of his past lyric "I" here also as his relinquishment of authorial intent and dependence, instead, on language itself as the creator of meaning. For a cogent analysis of the tension between authorial intent and language as alternative sources of a literary text's meaning in contemporary literary theory, which ultimately privileges neither, see Antoine Compagnon, *Literature, Theory, and Common Sense*, Carol Cosman, trans., New French Thought, Thomas Pavel and Mark Lilla eds. (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2004 [1998]), 30-33 and 68.

[377] Shāmlū, *Qaṭʿnāmah*, 63-64.

[378] Discussing the roles of the lyric "I" and "You" in terms of the development of poetic modernism, W.R. Johnson writes, "Since its romantic flowering meditative verse has itself changed in various ways, but common to these changes are the isolation, the self-sufficiency, of the lyric I and the virtual disappearance of the lyric You." *The Idea of Lyric: Lyric Modes in Ancient and Modern Poetry* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1982), 8.

lyric "I" now links himself with the collective, the masses to whom he will now attempt to give voice. Sloughing off the dead weight of national myths and Romantic nationalism, the lyric "I" is reborn through and in his newfound political commitment to the subjugated and forgotten. The poem avoids subtle language in its unambiguous break with Shāmlū's earlier collection and its Romantic sensibilities.

A refrain rings out in the second half of *Song of a Man Who Killed Himself*, "*aknūn īn manam*!" ("Now this is me!"). Nine times the speaker declares his new existence as a committed poet after metaphorically burying Shāmlū's Romantic past and announcing the old poet's death.

Aknūn īn manam
bā gūrī dar zīrzamīn-i khāṭiram
kih ajnabī-'i khvīshtanam rā dar ān bih khāk sipurdah-am
dar tābūt-i āhang-hā-yi farāmūsh shudah-ash…
ajnabī'i khvīshtanī kih
man khanjar bih gulūyash nahādah-am
va ū rā kushtah-am dar iḥtiżārī-'i ṭūlānī,
va dar ān hangām
nah ābish dādah-am
nah duʿāʾī khvāndah-am!

Aknūn
īn
manam![379]

Now this is me
in the grave of the basement of my memory
Whose foreign self I have buried in the earth there
in the coffin of forgotten songs…
A foreign self whose
neck I have put a knife to
and have killed in drawn out agony,
and at the same time
I have given him no chance
and I have said no prayer!

Shāmlū's poetic development goes in the opposite direction. As his lyric "I" becomes more aware of the realities of existence, he becomes more interested in the experiences of those he speaks to.

[379] Shāmlū, *Qaṭʿnāmah*, 66-67.

Now
this
is me!

In the final section of the poem, the verb tense used in the initial stanza changes to represent the speaker's rebirth. When the poem opens, the verbs are in the simple past: "*nah ābish* dādam*"* ("I gave him no chance"), but now as the poem comes to a close the speaker uses the *māżī'i naqlī* (relational past), which roughly corresponds to the English present perfect. However, the relational past in Persian has a number of uses not found in the present perfect. For example, "[w]hen historical truths are felt to be of *special relevance* to the present, or to *transcend the past*, they are couched in this tense."[380] Reborn in commitment to *shumā* (you) rather than *khvīshtan* (the self), the speaker employs the relational past to indicate the continued relevance of his killing his own poetic past along with his previously uncommitted poetic self in the present moment, from which point he will devote himself to others. Although the literal translation of these verbs makes for clumsy English, there is no other way to indicate how, for instance, the relational past tense of "*nahādah-am*" ("I *have put*") chronologically extends the import of the speaker's murder-suicide. "I *have put* a knife," "I *have killed*," "I *have given* no chance," and "I *have said* no prayer" convert the simple past tense of the earlier verses into a past that still resonates in the present.

Moreover, the words repeated throughout the poem, "now this is me," flank the final stanza, affirming the speaker's newfound identity. The speaker declares his existence, "Now this is me / in the grave of the basement of my memory / Whose foreign self I have buried in the earth there / in the coffin of forgotten songs…" The speaker looks back on his past in Shāmlū's

[380] Wheeler M. Thackston, *An Introduction to Persian*, 4th Ed. (Bethesda, MD: Ibex Publishers, 2009 [1978]), 44. Italics added.

Romantic *dīvān* of *Forgotten Songs* and remembers in vivid detail how he "killed" his previous poetic identity.

In the process of burying his old poetic self along with the *Forgotten Songs*, Shāmlū metapoetically recreates himself in the pages of the *Manifesto* as an engaged revolutionary poet ready to sacrifice himself to obtain justice for a collective "You." His paratextual comments on the *Manifesto* provide yet more evidence to help us understand his conception of the collection's place in relation to his earlier poetry. He writes that its first two poems, "Until the Red Blossom of a Shirt" and "Song of a Man Who Killed Himself," are the "direct result of the regret and spiritual pain I felt after the childish mistake I made publishing a handful of weak poems and worthless fragments in a book called *Forgotten Songs*."[381] By killing off his old poetic self and burying him along with the *Forgotten Songs*, Shāmlū is born again in the *Manifesto*.

However, notwithstanding Shāmlū's belief in the possibility of writing committed poetry in the *Manifesto*, the collection's relatively straightforward language (in comparison with that of his later work) and obvious political commitment still falls foul of Adorno's qualifications for autonomous art, art that avoids the features and approaches that would place it alongside simplistic propaganda.[382] Despite Shāmlū's attempts at overcoming the objectification of humanity in the *Manifesto*, it would be easy for us to understand the collection in parallel with Bertolt Brecht's more explicitly political dramatic works. Its straightforward commitment emerges as the other side of the bureaucratic language of jargon, a claim to subjectivity that remains "borrowed" from the jargon itself. Adorno elaborates,

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[381] Shāmlū, *Qaṭʿnāmah*, 89.

[382] Adorno, "Commitment," 178.

> The stereotypes of the jargon support and reassure subjective movement. They seem to guarantee that one is not doing what in fact he is doing—bleating with the crowd—simply by virtue of his using those stereotypes to guarantee that one has achieved it all himself, as an unmistakably free person. The formal gesture of autonomy replaces the content of autonomy. Bombastically, it is called commitment, but it is heteronomously borrowed.[383]

Following a second prison term that came in the aftermath of the 1953 coup against Mosaddegh and the resultant disillusionment with out and out Communism among Iranian leftists,[384] Shāmlū would eventually nuance his political commitment by basing it on a poetics of human subjectivity in 1957's *Fresh Air*[385] and the collections he published after it.[386] I end my analysis of Shāmlū's poetic development with his move away from his early Romanticism to the political motivations of the *Manifesto* in order to bring out the distinctions between his outward political commitment and the autonomous but just as politically meaningful late-career poetry of Furūgh Farrukhzād.

Furūgh Farrukhzād's Death and Persian Poetic Modernism

Farrukhzād's final poem carries on a conversation with Shāmlū's poetry, moving away from his committed poetics of death and the political realm into the existential. Shāmlū explicitly connects his poetry to the political context of its composition: life under the repressive regime of

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[383] Adorno, *Jargon of Authenticity*, 18.

[384] See Negin Nabavi, *Intellectuals and the State in Iran: Politics, Discourse, and the Dilemma of Authenticity* (Gainesville, FL: University Press of Florida, 2003), 17-18 and especially Chapter 2, "Crisis of the Intellectuals: 1953-1960," 19-38.

[385] For a thorough analysis of this collection and its place in the history of political commitment in Persian poetry, see Chapter Three of Samad Alavi, "The Poetics of Commitment in Modern Persian," 90-121.

[386] Many examples of these later poems have been collected and translated in the recently-published Ahmad Shamlu, *Born Upon the Dark Spear: Selected Poems of Ahmad Shamlu*, Jason Bahbak Mohaghegh trans. (New York: Contra Mundum Press, 2015).

the Shah. He thus provides his readers with the symbolic code to unlock his poetry from the get-go. Farrukhzād, on the other hand, more often writes poetry that operates with a carefully crafted ambivalence about politics.[387] My focus here is her later verse because, as she herself admitted and as Michael Hillman and others have agreed, it was only in the latter portion of her career that she started to believe she had truly begun to write fully modernist verse.[388] "[A]s [Farrukhzād] pointed out in interviews, her poetry was not concerned exclusively with the predicament of women but rather called for a change in attitudes which create and reinforce all manner of stereotypes."[389] Yet "Farrukhzād's later poetry," Hillman explains, "is as close to her life in sound, diction, and techniques as the content of all of her poetry so obviously is."[390] The poetry from the latter portion of Farrukhzād's career thus offers both an extremely personal reflection on the relationship between her life and her art as well as an acerbic commentary on what it means to be modern.

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[387] She did, however, write some directly political poetry. Consider "*Ay marz-i pur guhar…*" ("O Bejewelled Land…") in particular. Furūgh Farrukhzād, *Tavalludī dīgar*, 11th ed. (Tihrān: Intishārāt-i Murvārīd, 2536 [1977]), 148-157. Translation in *Forugh Farrokhzad: Another Birth and other poems*, 99-107.

[388] See Chapter Two of Hillman's *A Lonely Woman*, 37-72. On page 37, Hillman cites a radio interview Farrukhzād gave in 1964, also quoted in the Introduction to *Forugh Farrokhzad: Poet of Modern Iran*, 3. Answering a question about the relationship of her life to her poetry, she claims, "[I]f the point to this question is the explanation of a handful of circumstances and issues relating to one's life work, which in my case is poetry, then I have to say that the time for such a review has not yet arrived, because I have just recently begun dealing with poetry in a serious way." In their comments, Brookshaw and Rahimieh write that Farrukhzād's "own remarks in this interview point us away from a reductive reading of her poetry as a simple reflection of her life." Discussing the still unexplored value of Farrukhzād's earlier poetry, which has yet to receive a fair appraisal, Farzaneh Milani admits, "It is true that Forugh reached the height of her poetic achievement in the later poems." "Love and Sexuality in the Poetry of Forugh Farrokhzad," 120. Because of the limitations in space presented by this study and my focus on specifically modernist verse, I will only be dealing with a selection of Farrukhzād's *ouevre*, as I have also done with Shāmlū's poetry, notwithstanding the shortcomings inherent to such an approach. The alternative, however, would morph this chapter into two biographical monographs rather than what it is: a critical analysis of two simultaneously opposed yet complementary versions of Persian modernist poetry after Nīmā.

[389] Nasrin Rahimieh, *Oriental Responses to the West: Comparative Essays in Select Writers from the Muslim World* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1990), 44.

[390] Hillman, *A Lonely Woman*, 110.

The title of Farrukhzād's final collection, *Tavalludī dīgar* (*Another Birth*), announces the poet's engagement with the theme of death and rebirth that links together all the poems examined in this dissertation and that make up the planetary corpus of modernist poetry more broadly. In these later poems, Farrukhzād builds on the Persian modernist poetic tradition, developing the formal innovations Nīmā pioneered in the 1930s by introducing new combinations of poetic feet from different meters into the same poem.[391] Depending on a wide range of intertextual references to both the Persian and broader Near Eastern poetic and mythic traditions as well as the European modernists' preoccupation with degraded modern urban existence and apotheosis of an unsullied past, she brings modernist Persian poetry to its apex. To do so, her lyric "I" takes the position of both observer and participant in modern life, the Iranian female equivalent to Baudelaire's *flâneur*. The speaker in Farrukhzād's final collection is a *flâneuse*[392] who traverses the boundary between public and private, "seek[ing] refuge in the crowd"[393] to bear witness to the modern Iranian condition.

[391] Contra Shāmlū's *shiʿr-i sipīd* (blank verse), Farrukhzād continues to depend on premodern poetic feet. However, because she took their various combinations to new extremes and used different meters in a single poem, it is admittedly extremely difficult to parse the Arabic prosodic structures in her later poetry. For a short analysis of her use of poetic feet in "Let Us Believe in the Beginning of the Cold Season," see Ḥusayn Ḥasan'pūr Ālāshtī and Parvānah Dilāvar, "*ʿAnāṣir-i sabk'sāz dar mūsīqī-'i shiʿr-i Furūgh Farrukhzād*," *Faṣl'nāmah-i takhaṣṣuṣī-'i adabiyyāt-i Fārsī-'i Dānishgāh-i Āzād-i Islāmī-'i Mashhad* 5, no. 18 (Tābistān, 1387 [Summer, 2008]), 125-126. http://fa.journals.sid.ir/ViewPaper.aspx?id=133315.

[392] While Persian is a non-gendered language that uses the same pronoun (*ū*) for "he" and "she" and though we ought to avoid considering Farrukhzād's lyric "I" as being co-terminal with herself throughout the poem and therefore necessarily feminine, at many points in "Let Us Believe in the Beginning of the Cold Season" the lyric "I" presents itself as female. Beyond "And this is me / a woman alone," it also announces, "that man who was my mate had returned within my seed / […] and I became the bride of acacia blossoms" and asks, "Will I once again comb / my hair in the wind?" Farrukhzād, *Īmān biyāvarīm*, 21, 32; *Another Birth: Selected Poems of Forugh Farrokhzad*, 65, 68-69.

[393] "The flâneur still stands on the threshold—of the metropolis as of the middle class," Walter Benjamin writes about Baudelaire's *flâneur*, "Neither has him in its power yet. In neither is he at home. He seeks refuge in the crowd." Walter Benjamin, *The Writer of Modern Life: Essays on Charles Baudelaire*, Michael W. Jennings ed., Howard Eiland, Edmund Jephcott, Rodney Livingston, and Harry Zohn eds. (Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2006), 40. Benjamin originally wrote the essay in 1935.

Contrary to Shāmlū's open commitment in the poetry I examined in the first half of the chapter, Farrukhzād generally avoids using directly political language, opting instead for poetry rich in metaphor and allusion that nevertheless produces a political commentary on modern life. Her commitment is essentially erotic, especially in light of her emphasis on physical desire and introduction of the female gaze to modern Persian poetry—yet another important modernist contribution she makes as a *flâneuse*. Moreover, Farrukhzād depicts real bodies that get old, die, decay, etc., in contrast to earlier presentations of the body in Persian poetry. Furthermore, whereas Shāmlū's "Until the Red Blossom of and Shirt" and "Song of a Man Who Killed Himself" depend on revolutionary rhetoric to connect their message to the broader struggle against oppression and colonialism across the Global South, Farrukhzād's late poetry subtly engages with the planetary modernist movement to cut into the pith of modern existence and lay it bare for all to see. Although her poetry is grounded in individual experience, it offers its solitary view as a universal investigation of the challenges and possibilities of modernity.

With *Another Birth*, Farrukhzād's lyric "I" complete's Nīmā's project as representative of Iranian modernity. In this last collection, she stretches the premodern poetic feet of the *ʿarūż* to their utmost limit yet her poetry still finds its formal ground in their rhythms.[394] These poems realize Nīmā's modernist vision, by bringing together the experience of modern life with the

[394] In a letter to Aḥmad Riżā Aḥmadī, Furūgh implored the poet, "My dear Ahmad Reza - don't forget the 'meter.' Listen to me, and never forget it. […] Everything which comes into existence and lives follows a line of distinct forms and arrangements and grows within them. Poetry is also like this, and if you say it is not, and if others say it is not, then they are in my opinion mistaken. If you do not harness force within a form, you have not utilized that force, you have wasted it." In another interview, she answered the question "When you began (writing poetry), did you turn to Western literature?" by saying, "No. I looked at its content. That's natural. But at the meter, no - it is different. The Persian language has its own music, and it is this music that creates and directs the meter of Persian poetry." *Another Birth and other poems*, 187-188 and 198. Ālāshtī and Dilāvar describe Farrukhzād's later work as "poems in meters particular to Farrukhzād, which [initially] appear to be Nīmāic and within which different meters are combined or [poetic] feet are rearranged — a style particular to Furūgh." They add, "The poetry and metrics particular to Furūgh fill the gap between Nīmāic poetry and blank verse poetry (*shiʿr-i sipīd*) or prose poetry (*shiʿr-i manṯūr*)." "*ʿAnāṣir-i sabk'sāz*," 122 and 123.

premodern Persian literary tradition, the ancient mythological themes of the Near East, and the ongoing interaction of Persian poetry with European literature and culture more broadly.

Farrukhzād started with Nīmā. "Nima for me was a beginning," she said, discussing her poetic education.

> You know, Nima was a poet in whom I saw, for the first time, an intellectual atmosphere and a kind of human perfection, like Hafez. I, as a reader, felt I was dealing with a man, not just a bunch of superficial sentiments and trite, commonplace words — a factor in explaining and analyzing the problems, a vision and sensibility that rose above ordinary conditions and petty needs. His simplicity always astounded me, especially when behind this simplicity I would suddenly recognize all the complexities and dark questions of life, like a star that directs a person's face to the sky. In his simplicity, I discovered my own simplicity… But the greatest impact Nima left on me was in terms of the language and forms of his poetry. I can't say how and in what way I am or am not under Nima's influence.[395]

Just as Nīmā formed his modernist project out of the dual influences of modern French poetry and the premodern Persian tradition, Farrukhzād also looked to the West, finding new sources of inspiration Nīmā did not, including, most saliently, the mythically-inspired poetry of T.S. Eliot. While Nīmā came to the modernist tropes of death and rebirth through his readings of the French modernists, Farrukhzād's fascination with Eliot's poetry—*The Waste Land* and "The Hollow Men" in particular—brought her to fruitful poetic ground.

Another Birth, as a collection of poetry, immediately announces itself as a part of the planetary modernist movement with its title. Like Nīmā, Eliot, al-Sayyāb, and other modernists across the planet who used the same modernist symbolism of death and rebirth, Farrukhzād's hopes for a new life are tempered by uncertainty about the possibility of breaking out of an unending earthly cycle. Her lyric "I" ruminates on life in "Another Birth," attempting to offer a metaphorical analog for it:

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[395] *Another Birth and other poems*, 195.

zindagī shāyad
yak khiyābān-i dirāzast kih har rūz zanī bā zaṃbīlī az ān mīguz̲arad
zindagī shāyad
rīsmānīst kih mardī bā ān khūd rā az shākhah mīāvīzad
zindagī shāyad ṭiflīst kih az madrasah bar mīgardad

zindagī shāyad afrūkhtan-i sīgārī bāshad, dar fāṣilah-'i rikhvatnāk-i du hamāghūshī
yā ʿubūr-i gīj-i rahguz̲arī bāshad
kih kulāh az sar bar mīdārad
va bih yak rahguz̲ar-i dīgar bā labkhandī bīmaʿnī mīgūyad ʻṣubḥ bikhayr'[396]

Perhaps life
is a long street on which a woman with a basket passes every day.
Perhaps life
is a rope with which a man hangs himself from a branch.
Perhaps life is a child returning from school.

Perhaps life is lighting a cigarette in the languid repose between two embraces
or the mindless transit of a passer-by
who tips his hat
and with a meaningless smile says 'good morning' to another passer-by.[397]

The repetition of the phrase "*zindagī shāyad*" ("perhaps life is") reflects the speaker's search for meaning in the fleeting experiences of other passers-by. She is a *flâneuse* looking out on the city and its residents, hoping to locate some sense of life's purpose. However hard she tries to grasp them, the brief moments she suggests slip away in meaningless repetition. Experience, not metaphysical philosophizing, holds the only meaning in these lines, but experience is fleeting. The *flâneuse* here reminds us of this by also repeating the word root "*guz̲ar*" in "*mīguz̲arad*" and "*rahguz̲arī*," which also hearken back to Baudelaire's pivotal reflections on modern life as well as those of other modernists like Eliot and Nīmā.

[396] Furūgh Farrukhzād, *Tavalludī dīgar*, 164-165.

[397] *Another Birth and other poems*, 111.

Farrukhzād's *flâneuse* is a uniquely individual being in her experience of the modern city. Discussing her further modernist development in "Let Us Believe in the Beginning of the Cold Season," which avoids the "pitfalls of more mainstream modernist commitment to social and political *engagement* in verse," Hillman explains that "[h]er poetry of life may occasionally suffer because of its subjectivity, but at least life's vitality shows through, whereas in poetry of social commitment, sometimes only ideology is communicated, often lacking both verisimilitude and the subjective truth of personal experience."[398] If we follow Hillman's approach—which falls in line with al-Sayyāb's reading of the reactionary T.S. Eliot's *The Waste Land* as a better critique of capitalism than any openly committed Communist work—we can further open up "Let Us Believe in the Beginning of the Cold Season" to an interpretation that goes beyond the poem's subjective qualities and accounts for Farrukhzād's masterful incorporation of and reflections on the planetary modernist tradition. I argue that the inherent political ambivalence of Farrukhzād's poetry allows it to function as a fiercer criticism of modern society in comparison to Shāmlū's explicitly committed poetry when we consider them both in light of Adorno's conception of autonomous art.

Farrukhzād's poetics it at once personal and cosmic, a reflection on the human condition and its intimate connection with the death and rebirth cycle at the heart of modernist poetry. As her poetic style matured, she abandoned the more traditional forms used in her early collections and began to engage fully with modernist themes.[399] As Farrukhzād continued exploring the world of art, poetry, and cinema, her sources of poetic inspiration began to migrate beyond the

[398] Hillman, *A Lonely Woman*, 126. Italics in original

[399] For a study of the changes in the themes of Farrukhzād's poetry over time, see Nāhīd Kabīrī, "*Ḥaqq bā shāʿirī ast kih dar panāh-i āyinah mīmīrad…*," *Kasī kih mis̲l-i hīch kas nīst*, 235-248.

borders of Iran. After she began working with the film director Ibrāhīm Gulistān (b. 1922) in 1958, opportunities for international travel opened up to her. She and Gulistān eventually carried on a lasting romantic relationship, and she also traveled to England, Holland, and Germany with the support of his film production company, Golestan Studios.[400] During the winter of 1963 when she was in Germany, she produced a collection of modern German poetry in Persian translation.[401] The collection is but one example of Farrukhzād's enduring interest in modern European poetry,[402] which also led her to the work of T.S. Eliot, whose poetry had an enduring impact on the final poems she wrote.[403] In them, we can locate the presence of Eliot's pessimism about the future in Farrukhzād's intertextual references to his poetry, which she uses to create her own poetics of death. In contrast to how Shāmlū hopefully conceives of death as a step toward revolution, Farrukhzād considers death ambivalently. Farrukhzād's later verse is more politically significant than committed poetry precisely because it strips death of political meaning. Her portrayal of the lyric "I" as an observer of modern life forces her audience to come face to face with death and give it, and therefore also their own lives, meaning in a way quite different than Shāmlū's lyric "I" produces meaning.

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[400] See the timeline of her life in *Another Birth and other poems*, 232-233.

[401] Furūgh Farrukhzād, *Marg-i man rūzī…: majmūʿah-'i az namūnah-hā-yi āsār-i shāʿirān-i Ālmān dar nīmah-'i avval-i qarn-i bīstum*, tarjamah-'i Furūgh Farrukhzād va Dr. Masʿūd Farrukhzād (Tihrān: Kitābsarā-yi Tandīs, 1379 [2000]).

[402] Dabashi adds that "[w]hen she returned to Tehran, she would carry the lasting memories of Europe with her back to her homeland. The effect was not one of ambivalence or confusion, identity crisis or misplaced emotions. Quite to the contrary: the effect was an emotive universe that was *rooted in Iran* but *global in its sentiments*, rooted in the world but effervescent in its worldly conception of her homeland." *Iran without Borders*, 111-112. Italics added.

[403] Although *The Waste Land* was translated into Persian by 1955 (Yāḥaqqī, *Jūybār-i laḥẓah-hā*, 103), Farrukhzād remained "very keen on improving her reading skills in English so that she could read T.S. Eliot and other modernist English or American poets in the original," as Karim Emami (d. 2005) remembers it. "Recollections and Afterthoughts," lecture given in Austin, TX (n.d.), http://www.forughfarrokhzad.org/papers/papers3.htm. See also *Forugh Farrokhzad: Another Birth and other poems*, xii.

"And this is me / a woman alone /," Farrukhzād's lyric "I" declares, "at the threshold of a cold season / at the beginning of understanding / the polluted existence of the earth / and the simple, sad pessimism of the sky."[404] In perfect harmony with her modernist forebears, from the Western tradition's T.S. Eliot to Iran's Nīmā, she integrates an undercurrent of pessimism about the cycle of life and death throughout the poem. Here at the opening of "Let Us Believe in the Beginning of the Cold Season," Farrukhzād's lyric "I" and her reflection on existence immediately brings to mind Baudelaire's *flâneur* in "*À une passante*" ("To A Passer-by").[405] As a witness integral to her own poetic scene, her "I" attempts to record the fleeting moments that make up modern life in a continuation of a theme we can trace all the way back in Iranian modernist poetry to Nīmā's "*Quqnūs*," where "at far off points / people pass by" (*v-andar nuqāṭ-i dūr / khalq-and dar ʿubūr*),[406] and in the European tradition to both Baudelaire's flashes of insight on the streets of Paris and Eliot's "Unreal City" in *The Waste Land*. There, observing the street in the morning, Eliot's lyric "I" looks on at the walking dead: "And each man fixed his eyes before his feet. / Flowed up the hill and down King William Street, / To where Saint Mary Woolnoth kept the hours / With a dead sound on the final stroke of nine."[407] Farrukhzād echoes these lines throughout "Let Us Believe in the Beginning of the Cold Season," which laments the inexorable organization of modern life into specific blocks of time.

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[404] Farrukhzād, *Īmān biyāvarīm*, 23. Translation in Hillman, *A Lonely Woman*, 125. Translation modified.

[405] After a woman quickly passes by Baudelaire's *flâneur* in the Parisian streets, he wonders, "A flash . . . then night ! — O lovely fugitive / I am suddenly reborn from your swift glance ; / Shall I never see you till eternity?" ("*Un éclair.. puis la nuit ! — Fugitive beauté / Dont le regard m'a fait soudainement renaître, / Ne te verrai-je plus que dans l'éternié?*") Charles Baudelaire, *The Flowers of Evil*, C. F. MacIntyre trans., 118. French on 337.

[406] Nīmā, *Majmūʿah*, 222.

[407] T.S. Eliot, *The Annotated Waste Land with Eliot's Contemporary Prose*, Lawrence Rainey ed., 2nd ed. (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2006), 59.

"Let Us Believe in the Beginning of the Cold Season" is a primary example of Persian modernist poetry due to its connections to modernism as a planetary movement. In comparison to Shāmlū's directly political poetry in the *Qaṭʿnāmah*, Farrukhzād's later poetry constitutes a significantly different direction among Nīmā's followers. Each is, however, transnational in its own way. Shāmlū's committed poetry often looks beyond the borders of Iran in his transnational calls for solidarity with other oppressed peoples across the globe. Farrukhzād's poetry is a product of her prolonged engagement with the forms and themes of the broader modernist poetic movement, not only in Iran but in the West as well.

One striking feature of her poem that has remained completely ignored in English scholarship is her innovative use of premodern metrical patterns. Just as Eliot ironically employs traditional English meters such as iambic pentameter in *The Waste Land*, Farrukhzād uses a unique combination of premodern metrical feet throughout "Let Us Believe in the Beginning of the Cold Season." While the majority of the lines follow a pattern based on a standard *mużāriʿ* (similar) meter, Farrukhzād sometimes uses an irregular version of the *mużāriʿ* (which could scan as another meter entirely: the *mujtass* ["docked" or "amputated"])[408] to distinguish certain lines from others and to bring our attention to the central theme of the poem: a meditation on the meaning of death.

Take, for example, the use of metrics over the course of the following lines, which come towards the beginning of the poem after a long set of lines with fairly regular metrical progressions.

Dar āsitānah-'i faṣlī sard
dar maḥfil-i ʿazā-yi āyinah-hā

[408] Wright points out that the Arabic name of the *muḍāriʿ* (the "similar" meter) was so chosen due to its similarity to the *mujtathth* (*mujtass* in Persian) meter since we might find a single line fits both by "adopting another mode of scansion." Wright, *A Grammar of the Arabic Language*, Vol. 2, 364-365 and 368.

va ijtimāʿ-i sūgvār-i tajribah-hā-yi parīdah rang
va īn ghurūb bārvar shudah az dānish-i sukūt
chigūnah mīshavad bih ānkasī kih mīravad īnsān
ṣabūr,
sangīn,
sargardān.
Farmān-i īst dād.
Chigūnah mīshavad bih mard guft kih ū zandah nīst, ū hīchvaqt zandah nabūdahst.

On the threshold of a cold season,
In the mournful assembly of mirrors
in the dirgeful gathering of pale experiences
in this sunset impregnated with the knowledge of silence
how can one tell a person who goes along
patiently,
seriously,
lost
to stop?
How can you tell a man he's not alive, that he's never been alive?[409]

Notice the near breakdown of the poetic feet in the following as the poem posits, "how can one tell a person who goes along / patiently, / seriously, / lost / to stop?" and then rushes to ask, "How can you tell a man he's not alive, that he's never been alive?" The feet of the entire section are as follows:

mafāʿilun faʿilātun faʿ
mustafʿilun mafāʿilun faʿilun
mafāʿilun mafāʿilun mustafʿilun mafā
mafāʿilun mafāʿilun faʿilātun mafāʿilun
mafāʿilun mafāʿilun mafāʿilun mafāʿīlun
mafā
mustaf
mafʿūlun
mustafʿilun mafā
mafāʿilun mafāʿilun mafāʿilun mustafʿilun faʿūlun mafāʿilun fāʿilātun

Or, in longs and shorts, with " / " separating the feet:

˘ – ˘ – / ˘ ˘ – – / –

[409] Farrukhzād, *Īmān biyāvarīm*, 25-26; *Another Birth: Selected Poems of Forugh Farrokhzad*, 66. Translation modified.

– – ◡ – / ◡ – ◡ – / ◡ ◡ –
◡ – ◡ – / ◡ – ◡ – / – – ◡ – / ◡ –
◡ – ◡ – / ◡ – ◡ – / ◡ ◡ – – / ◡ – ◡ –
◡ – ◡ – / ◡ – ◡ – / ◡ – ◡ – / ◡ – – –
◡ –
– –
– – –
– – ◡ – / ◡ –
◡ – ◡ – / ◡ – ◡ – / ◡ – ◡ – / – – ◡ – / ◡ – – / ◡ – ◡ – / – ◡ – –

While the metrics of the first five lines do not match, these lines do, as Sīrūs Shamīsā explains, consist of feet from either the *mużāriʿ* or the *mujtass* meters.[410] Farrukhzād's innovation in this poem and her other late poems—which even go beyond her own metrical experiments in *Another Birth* and signal the culmination of Nīmā's pioneering metrical techniques—is to repeat one foot out of a metrical pair as many times as she needs,[411] such as we find in the fifth line above: *mafāʿilun* repeats four times (with an additional long syllable in the fourth: *mafāʿīlun*). The usual pattern of the meter's feet (*mafāʿilun faʿilātun mafāʿilun faʿilun*) never completes.

The metrical games Farrukhzād plays here allow her to slow down and speed up the poem at certain points. As the imagined person whom the speaker considers telling "that he's not alive" "goes along / patiently, / seriously, / lost," the meter itself is almost lost, switching between disconnected parts of broken feet, searching for itself: "*mafā* / *mustaf* / *mafʿūlun*" (◡ – / – – / – – –). This slog of long syllables comes to a halt with a complete poetic foot followed by

[410] The base feet of the *mużāriʿ* here being *mafʿūlu fāʿilātu mafāʿīlu fāʿilun* and of the *mujtass*: *mafāʿilun faʿilātun mafāʿilun faʿilun*. For Thiesen's presentation of these meters, see *A Manual of Classical Persian Prosody*, 144-148 and 153-158. For an extremely detailed analysis of Furūgh's use of meter in "Let Us Believe in the Beginning of the Cold Season" and the scansions on which I am depending for my analysis here, see Sīrūs Shamīsā, *Nigāhī bih Furūgh Farrukhzād*, 1st ed. (Tihrān: Intishārāt-i Murvārīd, 1382 [2003]), 80-83.

[411] Shamīsā, *Nigāhī bih Furūgh Farrukhzād*, 82.

another fragment in the *mujtass* meter: *mustafʿilun mafā* (¯ ¯ ˘ ¯ / ˘ ¯),[412] when the speaker says, "*Farmān-i īst dād*" ("tell […] to stop"). Finally, the words burst forth from the speaker in the poem's longest line,[413] which initially repeats a single foot three times (*mafāʿilun mafāʿilun mafāʿilun*) and follows that with four more complete feet. The quick succession of feet, punctuated by eleven short syllables at irregular intervals (of twenty-seven, compared to the three short syllables of thirteen total in the previous four lines), formally manifests the speaker's gasps for breath as she tries to ask the poem's central question: "How can you tell a man he's not alive, that he's never been alive?" Farrukhzād's metrical expertise, plainly displayed in these lines, and her willingness to go beyond the bounds of Nīmā's metrical innovations while not leaving premodern metrics completely behind brings Persian modernist poetry to its furthest limits. Farrukhzād is, therefore, not only Nīmā's poetic heir but also an indispensable figure in the wider movement of planetary modernism. Indeed, the parallels between her use of metrics and those of preeminent English modernist T.S. Eliot in *The Waste Land* are many.[414]

To turn to another direct example of Farrukhzād's engagement with planetary modernism, consider the role of passing time in the poem's second stanza, which brings together

[412] Shamīsā surmises that the meter could also be in the *mużāriʿ*, in which case the feet would be *mafʿūlu fāʿilun*. *Nigāhī bih Furūgh Farrukhzād*, 82.

[413] In the edition I am using, it is so long that it does not fit on a single line, and the words *zandah nabūdahst* are left-justified on the page.

[414] Farrukhzād's use of metrical feet that might be understood to come from two separate meters as well as her frequent inclusion of alternative poetic feet not found in Persian prosody but available in Arabic (for a thorough analysis and examples, see Shamīsā, *Nigāhī bih Furūgh*, 83) complicate any sense of overall unity we might hope to find in the poem. This lack of unity reflects the general uncertainty about modern existence that lies at the heart of the poem and functions in parallel with Eliot's alternation between blank verse and metered lines to reflect the same idea in *The Waste Land*. For more on Eliot's use of metrics in *The Waste Land*, see Harvey Gross and Robert McDowell, *Sound and Form in Modern Poetry*, 2nd ed. (Ann Arbor, MI: The University of Michigan Press, 1996 [1985]), 175-177. M.H. Kamyabee's Master's thesis, "The waste land vision in T.S. Eliot and Forugh Farrokhzad" (Pahlavi University, 1978), might provide further insights on these parallels, but I have not been able to consult a copy.

the regimented time of the modern day, the natural changing of the seasons, and the eternal time of the afterlife, stalled in the body of a savior dead and buried.

Zamān guẕasht
zamān guẕasht va sāʿat chahār bār navākht
chahār bār navākht
imrūz rūz-i avval-i daymāh ast
man rāz-i faṣl-hā rā mīdānam
va ḥarf-i laḥẓah-hā rā mīfahmam
najāt dihandah dar gūr khaftah ast
va khāk, khāk-i paẕīrandah
ishāratīst bih ārāmash

Time passed
Time passed and the clock struck four
the clock struck four
Today is the first day of winter
I know the secrets of the seasons
and understand the words of the moments
The Redeemer sleeps in the grave
and the dust, the receptive dust
gives away his repose.[415]

The doubled repetition of "time passed / time passed" and "the clock struck four / the clock struck four" sonically echoes the four strikes of the hour. Four o'clock marks the end of the day and the beginning of night, just as the first day of winter signals the oncoming cold season after which the poem is titled. The lyric "I" then intervenes at this moment to tell the reader more about her role in the poem: she "know[s] the secrets of the seasons / and understand[s] the words of the moments." That is, she will explain what modern existence is like, when the only thing we can be sure of is death and the only one who can save us is sleeping in the ground. I have chosen to translate *najāt dihandah* (literally "rescue-giver") as "Redeemer" to indicate the allusion to

[415] Farrukhzād, *Īmān biyāvarīm*, 24; *Another Birth: Selected Poems of Forugh Farrokhzad*, 65. Translation modified.

Christ, which is not as clear should one choose to use "savior."[416] In a fully modernist move, the lines deny the Redeemer's divinity and suggest that His body remains in the grave where its decay into dust "gives away his repose." The poem thus begins by stripping away hope for an eternal afterlife and subordinating life to the cycle of nature.

By incorporating one of the central themes of planetary modernist poetry, "Let Us Believe in the Beginning of the Cold Season" embodies the transnational movement of modernist themes. Farrukhzād's sustained engagement with the theme of death and rebirth and her portrayal of the speaker as a *flâneuse* in the poem show us how she goes about using the European tradition to build her own particular version of Persian modernist poetry, one which remains indebted to the modernist tradition Nīmā began but openly addresses itself to European modernism as well, particularly the poetry of T.S. Eliot. Other than the poem's overall dependence on the cycle of life and death made famous in *The Waste Land*, it also specifically references "The Hollow Men" (1925). Farrukhzād's English translators have pointed out her paraphrase of Eliot's lines "Between the idea / And the reality / Between the motion / And the act / Falls the shadow" when she writes "*miyān-i panjarah va dīdan / hamīshah fāṣilah īst*" ("Between the window and the seeing / always lies a distance").[417] However, more than simply referencing Eliot's poem, Farrukhzād fully integrates its driving theme into her own poem: the

[416] Javadi and Sallée go with "savior" while Kessler and Banani as well as Wolpé use "Messiah." The word "Messiah," however, is a term more often used in the Jewish tradition, while Christ is often called "the Redeemer" in Christianity. I prefer "the Redeemer" because of its more specifically Christian resonance, which matches the lines that follow about His being buried in a grave.

[417] See *Another Birth: Selected Poems of Forugh Farrokhzad*, 132 and *Another Birth and other poems*, 123, each by the same translators. They give an incorrect citation of Eliot, "Between the idea and the act / Falls the shadow." Cf. *T.S. Eliot: Collected Poems 1909-1962* (New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, 1963), 81-82. Barbara Fister also points out that "Let Us Believe in the Beginning of the Cold Season" "contains references to—and emulates the mood of—Eliot's 'Hollow Men.'" *Third World Women's Literatures: A Dictionary and Guide to Materials in English* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1995), 20.

loss of meaning, absence of hope, and pessimism about the future that defines the modernist view of the world. Eliot's poem opens, "We are the hollow men / We are the stuffed men / Leaning together / Headpiece filled with straw. Alas!"[418] Consider Farrukhzād's lines:

insān-i pūk
insān-i pūk-i pur az iʿtimād
nigāh kun kih dandān-hā-yash
chigūnah vaqt-i javīdan surūd mīkhvānand
va chashm-hā-yash
chigūnah vaqt-i khīrah shudan mīdarand
va ū chigūnah az kināri-i dirakhtān-i khīs mīguẕarad:
ṣabūr,
sangīn,
sargardān

Hollow man
Hollow man filled with confidence
Look how while chewing
his teeth sing a song
and while staring
his eyes are torn
and he, how he passes by the wet trees:
patiently,
gravely,
lost.[419]

Farrukhzād here includes a direct reference to Eliot's Hollow Man (*insān-i pūk*), signaling us to the transnational movement of modernist tropes. However, the direct reference to Eliot in these lines is only one element of Farrukhzād's broader engagement with planetary modernist themes in her later poetry. For instance, unlike Shāmlū's lyric "I," which inscribes itself in the poems I analyzed above and presents itself as an individual voice, Farrukhzād's lyric "I" invites us into the poem as her equal, her compatriot in the fallen modern world. The

[418] *T.S. Eliot: Collected Poems*, 79.

[419] Farrukhzād, *Īmān biyāvarīm*, 34-35; *Another Birth: Selected Poems of Forugh Farrokhzad*, 69-70. Translation modified.

imperative "Look" (*nigāh kun*) brings the reader into the poem to share the vision of Farrukhzād's *flâneuse*, a witness to desperate attempts to find meaning in the quick flashes of city life she sees.[420] The passing man is a constant reminder of death, as we have already seen in the poet's ruminations about the meaning of life in "Another Birth": "the mindless transit of a passer-by / who tips his hat / and with a meaningless smile says 'good morning' to another passer by." Death is everywhere in the modern city, where Farrukhzād's *flâneuse* disappears in the crowd to observe modern life.

Elsewhere in the poem, we find:

jināzah-hā-yi khūshbakht
jināzah-hā-yi malūl
jināzah-hā-yi sākit-i mutafakkir
jināzah-hā-yi khūsh bar khūrd, khūsh pūsh, khūsh khvurāk
dar īstgāh-hā-yi vaqt-hā-yi muʿayyan
va dar zamīnah-'i mashkūk-i nūr-hā-yi muvaqqat
va shavat-i kharīd-i mīvah-hā-yi fāsid-i bīhūdagī…
Āh,
chih mardumānī dar chār rāh-hā nigarān-i ḥavādiṯand
va īn ṣidā-yi ṣut-hā-yi tavaqquf
dar laḥẓah'ī kih bāyad, bāyad, bāyad
mardī bih zīr-i charkh-hā-yi zamān lih shavad
mardī kih az kinā[…]

Happy corpses
despondent corpses
silent, thoughtful corpses
well-mannered, well-dressed, well-eating corpses
in the stations of scheduled times
and the dubious background of temporary lights
greedily buying futility's rotten fruits.
Ah,

[420] "The lyric gaze glimpses isolated fragments, in keeping with the episodic rhythms of the street." Scott Brewster writes, discussing the changing role of the lyric "I" in modernist poetry. "The poet is a 'ragpicker', a sifter of the city's debris: the movement of the boulevard, its transient novelty and fleeting sensory stimuli, becomes a new subject in lyric poetry. In contrast to the static, contemplative look in the Romantic ode or greater lyric, the modernist gaze is fleeting and furtive, mimicking the restless mobility of urban modernity. The lyric moment now characterised by collisions and chance encounters that allow the 'I' only a temporary vantage point." *Lyric*, *The New Critical Idiom*, John Drakakis series ed. (New York: Routledge Taylor & Francis Group, 2009), 100.

how people stare at accidents in the intersections
and the sound of traffic whistles to stop
in an instant a man must, must, must
be crushed beneath the wheels of time
the man passing beside the wet trees…[421]

In these lines, and elsewhere, Farrukhzād's *flâneuse* criticizes the rigid structure of modern life "in the stations of scheduled times" that has turned people into walking corpses, just like the walking dead in Eliot's Unreal City. Contrary to her engagements with nature,[422] Farrukhzād presents how modernity opens up new, terrible, and mundane ways to die, like car accidents that cause minor inconveniences during a morning commute but force onlookers to consider their own mortality for at least a moment. "[I]n an instant a man must, must, must / be crushed beneath the wheels of time." Farrukhzād's poetics of death is informed by the experience of modernity, in stark contrast with Shāmlū's view of death as a step on the road toward revolutionary change. Her ambivalence about death alternatively casts it as meaningless and the only thing that means. Death structures every aspect of life to such an extent that people become corpses while they are still alive. The living dead populate the modern city, where the "man passing beside the wet trees" leads the speaker's mind to the inevitable end.

The man passing also appears early on in the poem, where the speaker plays on the intimate natural relationship of life and death, decay and growth, after catching a glimpse of him.

Dar kūchah bād mīāyad
dar kūchah bād mīāyad
va man bih juft'gīrī-'i gul-hā mīandīsham
bih ghunjah-hā-yī bā sāq-hā-yi lāghar-i kamkhūn
va īn zamān-i khastah-'i maslūl

[421] Farrukhzād, *Īmān biyāvarīm*, 40-41; *Another Birth: Selected Poems of Forugh Farrokhzad*, 72. Translation modified.

[422] Farrukhzād often associates truth with nature. Take for instance these lines from "*Fatḥ-i bāgh*" ("The Conquest of the Garden"): "Everyone knows / […] that we discovered truth in the garden / in the shy glance of a nameless flower" or these from "*Parandah faqaṭ yak parandah būd*" ("The Bird Was Only a Bird"): "The bird was small / The bird didn't think / He read no papers / He had no loans / The bird did not know men". *Tavalludī dīgar*, 127-128 and 147; *Another Birth: Selected Poems of Forugh Farrokhzad*, 53 and 55. Translation modified.

va mardī az kinār-i dirakhtān-i khīs mīguẕarad
mardī kih rishtah-hā-yi ābī-'i rag-hā-yash
mānand-i mār-hā-yi murdah az dū'sū-yi galūgāhash
bālā khazīdah-and
va dar shaqīqah-hā-yi munqalabash ān hijā-yi khūnīn rā
tikrār mīkunand
—salām
—salām
va man bih juft'gīrī-'i gul-hā mīandīsham

In the street the wind is blowing
In the street the wind is blowing
and I think of the pollination of the flowers
of the buds with their thin anemic stems
and this tired, consumptive time
A man is passing by the wet trees
a man, the lines of whose bluish veins
have crept up both sides of his throat
like dead snakes
and in his throbbing temples
those sanguine syllables are repeated:
— hello
— hello
and I think of the pollination of the flowers.[423]

These lines, like so many others throughout the poem, directly reference T.S. Eliot's ambivalent and at times quite pessimistic view of the utility of the death and rebirth myths he was so well known for integrating into his poetry. When the speaker says, "I think of the pollination of the flowers," the line hearkens back to Eliot's famous opening to *The Waste Land*, "April is the cruellest month, breeding / Lilacs out of the dead land, mixing / Memory and desire, stirring / Dull roots with spring rain."[424] But, more than making a simple reference to the European tradition, Farrukhzād here combines Eliot's poetic vision with her own. Faced with death in the image of the man passing with his blue, lifeless veins like de-oxygenated ropes

[423] Farrukhzād, *Īmān biyāvarīm*, 24-25; *Another Birth: Selected Poems of Forugh Farrokhzad*, 65.

[424] T.S. Eliot, *The Annotated Waste Land*, 57.

strangling him, the speaker can only "think of the pollination of the flowers." The Persian word used for "pollination" here is *juft'gīrī*, which is also used to mean "mating" and thus creates a grotesque sexual image linking death and life that parallels Eliot's sprouting corpse.[425] As time comes to its end for the passing man, the lyric "I" looks to the future when his body will reinvigorate the "thin, anemic stems" with nutrients as it decays. The cyclical process of life and death is further embedded in the repetition of the line "I think of the pollination of the flowers."

Farrukhzād's other poetry from late in her career also reflects the modernist poet's obsession with mortality. In a few pithy lines from another poem in her last collection, she writes, "*kasī marā bih āftāb / muʿarrafī nakhvāhad kard / kasī marā bih mīhmānī-'i gunjishk-hā nakhvāhad burd / parvāz rā bi-khāṭir bisipār / parandah murdanīst*" ("No one will introduce / me to the sun / No one will take me to the sparrows' feast / hold on to the memory of flight / the bird is mortal").[426] The final line is a premonition of Shāmlū's *Quqnūs dar bārān* (*The Phoenix in the Rain*),[427] a collection which would appear the very year of her death. The lines are at first despondent, despairing both of reaching heaven and of being able to appreciate earthly existence. Stuck in between eternity and existence, all the poet can hold on to is the hope of freedom, here as elsewhere represented by a bird in flight. However, pessimism takes over in the final line of the poem as the poet remembers that even the bird's freedom must have an end in death. This is not the hopeful end Nīmā's Phoenix meets in "*Quqnūs*" but rather a poetic reflection on the inevitability of death, an attempt to extract an ounce of freedom out of the course of one's life.

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[425] In the "Unreal City," one World War I veteran asks another, "That corpse you planted last year in your garden, / Has it begun to sprout? Will it bloom this year? / Or has the sudden frost disturbed its bed?" Eliot, *The Annotated Waste Land*, 59.

[426] Farrukhzād, *Īmān biyāvarīm*, 100. I have consulted the translations in Wolpé, *Sin: Selected Poems of Forugh Farrokhzad*, 111; *Forugh Farrokhzad: Another Birth and other poems*, 167; and Hillman, *A Lonely Woman*, 95.

[427] Aḥmad Shāmlū, *Quqnūs dar bārān*, 4th ed. (Tihrān: Naqsh-i Jahān, 1357 [1978; originally published in 1967]).

"Let Us Believe in the Beginning of the Cold Season" takes up these ideas in its overarching themes of loneliness, death-in-life, and mortality. In the flashes of city life Farrukhzād's *flâneuse* offers us, we are confronted by the unhappy realities of modern existence. "The Renaissance, it lied; the Enlightenment, it lied: the truth, the only truth, is bad mortality and complete loneliness while we live through the death we call life. […] All men are brothers, but, in another way, all men are alone."[428] Farrukhzād reminds us, immediately, that all women too are alone in the end. "And this is me / a woman alone." Later in the poem, she writes,

> *man sardam ast*
> *man sardam ast va angār hīchvaqt garm nakhvāham shud*
> *ay yār ay yagānahtarīn yār 'ān sharāb magar chand sālah būd?'*
> *nigāh kun kih dar īnjā*
> *zamān chih vaznī dārad*
> *va māhīyān chigūnah gūsht-hā-yi marā mījavand*
> *chirā marā hamīshah dar tah-i daryā nigāh mīdārī?*
>
> *Man sardam ast va az gūshvārah-hā-yi ṣadaf bīzāram*
> *man sardam ast va mīdānam*
> *kih az tamāmī'i awhām-i surkh-i yak shaqāyiq-i vaḥshī*
> *juz chand quṭrah khūn*
> *chīzī bijā nakhvāhad mānd.*
>
> I am cold
> I am cold, as if I'll never be warmed
> O friend, O most singular friend, how old was that wine?
> Look what a weight
> time has here
> and how the fish chew my flesh
> Why do you always keep me at the bottom of the sea?
>
> I am cold, and I hate these mother-of-pearl earrings
> I am cold, and I know
> that nothing will remain
> from all the red illusions of a wild poppy
> but a few drops of blood.[429]

[428] Johnson, *The Idea of Lyric*, 10-11.

[429] Farrukhzād, *Īmān biyāvarīm*, 29; cf. the translations in *Another Birth: Selected Poems of Forugh Farrokhzad*, 67 and *Bride of Acacias*, 97. Translations modified.

The lyric "I" here complains to a friend (a lover?) about being left alone to fend for itself "at the bottom of the sea." In these lines, the speaker crosses from the realm of the living to that of the dead, where she contemplates the end of the body ("the fish chew my flesh") and the hubris of those who imagine remaining present in the world after death, declaring, "I know / that nothing will remain / from all the red illusions of a wild poppy / but a few drops of blood." The lines are almost a direct refutation of the hopeful imagery employed in Shāmlū's poetry above, in which blood spills over into political revolution. Instead, Farrukhzād's subtle reference to *The Waste Land* imbues her own poem with Eliot's pessimism to challenge it, if only slightly. She alludes to the fourth section of Eliot's poem, "Death by Water."

> Phlebas the Phoenician, a fortnight dead,
> Forgot the cry of gulls, and the deep sea swell
> And the profit and loss.
> A current under sea
> Picked his bones in whispers. As he rose and fell
> He passed the stages of his age and youth
> Entering the whirlpool.
> Gentile or Jew
> O you who turn the wheel and look to windward,
> Consider Phlebas, who was once handsome and tall as you.[430]

By using the first person rather than the third in her version of the same story, Farrukhzād makes personal Eliot's admonition to those who deny the power of time. The lyric "I" in "Let Us Believe in the Beginning of the Cold Season" considers her body after its death, its eventual, inescapable fate, thus calling attention to the importance of what she does while alive. In contradistinction to how Shāmlū directly relates blood, sacrifice, and political change, Farrukhzād's lyric "I" admits that only "a few drops of blood," a faint trace, will remain after the flower of "red illusions" fades away.

[430] Eliot, *The Annotated Waste Land*, 66-67.

In the following lines, the speaker again condemns modernity's strict arrangement of time, which replaces the natural progression of the seasons:

> *sukūt chīst, chīst, chīst ay yagānahtarīn yār?*
> *Sukūt chīst bijuz ḥarf-hā-yi nāguftah*
> *man az guftan mīmānam, ammā zabān-i gunjishgān*
> *zabān-i zindagī-'i jumlah-hā-yi jārī-'i jashn-i ṭabīʿatast.*
> *Zabān-i gunjishgān yaʿnī: bahār. Barg. Bahār.*
> *Zabān-i gunjishgān yaʿnī: nasīm. ʿIṭr. Nasīm.*
> *Zabān-i gunjishgān dar kārkhānah mīmīrad.*
>
> What is silence? – what, what, O dearest only one?
> What is silence but unspoken words
> I refrain from speaking, but the language of sparrows
> is one of life in the flowing sentences of nature's celebration.
> The language of sparrows: Spring. Leaves. Spring.
> The language of sparrows: Breeze. Fragrance. Breeze.
> In factories the language of sparrows dies.[431]

The symptoms of capitalism manifest themselves throughout the poem, particularly here "in the factory, where the language of sparrows dies" ("*zabān-i gunjishgān dar kārkhānah mīmīrad*").[432] Repetitions of "and the clock struck four"[433] sound out to indicate modern life's regimentation to the reader, an order nearly impossible to escape in the city. In its combination of flashes of city life with its solid foundation in mythical allusions, "Let Us Believe in the Beginning of the Cold Season" offers a sustained engagement with the gamut of modernist themes found within the movement as a planetary phenomenon—not only as they appeared in Iran but also in Europe.

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[431] Farrukhzād, *Īmān biyāvarīm*, 38-39; *Another Birth: Selected Poems of Forugh Farrokhzad*, 71. Translation modified.

[432] Farrukhzād, *Īmān biyāvarīm*, 39. Cf. the translations found in *Bride of Acacias*, 100 and *Another Birth: Selected Poems of Forugh Farrokhzad*, 71.

[433] Farrukhzād, *Īmān biyāvarīm*, 24, 33, 35.

Unlike Shāmlū's explicitly political poetry that I examined earlier, Farrukhzād's poem depends on an ambivalent relationship between the lyric "I" and the world it describes. Brewster elaborates,

> The detachment of the lyric 'I' is exacerbated by the sense of poetry's marginalisation in the modern world. While this marginalisation seems to confirm Baudelaire's view that the modern is 'antilyrical', the provocative challenge to the staleness of everyday language, to mass culture and to bourgeois attitudes in the modernist lyric suggests confrontation with, rather than evasion of, this inhospitable climate.[434]

While we may not be able to say that poetry was (or is) as marginal in Iran as it has been in Europe or America following the modernist turn, we can recognize a similar detachment of Farrukhzād's lyric "I" from her subjects, who appear only in short flashes. This detachment carries with it political meaning, as Brewster argues about the modern lyric "I" more generally, precisely because of its ambivalence, which is not at all an "evasion" of reality but a "provocative challenge" to it. Though not explicitly political in its content, Farrukhzād's late poetry functions politically by virtue of its being autonomous art.

To stress how the poem so functions, in the final lines we read:

shāyad ḥaqīqat-i ān dū dast-i javān būd, ān dū dast-i javān
kih zīr-i bārish-i yakrīz-i barf madfūn shud
va sāl-i dīgar, vaqtī bahār
bā āsmān-i pusht-i panjarah hamkhvābah mīshavad
va dar tanash favarān mīkunand
favārah-hā-yi sabz-i sāqah-hā-yi sabukbār
shikūfah khvāhad dād ay yār, ay yagānahtarīn yār

īmān biyāvarīm bih āghāz-i faṣl-i sard…

Perhaps the truth was those two young hands, those two young hands
buried beneath the never-ending snow
and next year, when Spring
makes love to the sky behind the window
and shoots thrust from its body

[434] Brewster, *Lyric*, *The New Critical Idiom*, 100.

green shoots of carefree branches
will blossom, O dear one, O dearest only one.

Let us believe in the beginning of the cold season…[435]

Although the poem has until this point offered us with a series of modern life's depressing scenes: the detached *flâneuse*, capital's reorganization of nature, the loss of meaning in life symbolized by a stranger's doffing of his hat, etc., in these final lines a glimmer of hope flickers. Instead of an ironic invocation of the endless cycle of death and rebirth, here the speaker sincerely commands the reader (and herself) to believe in the beginning of the cold season, the only way forward to a truly new birth in spring. Of course, the speaker remains pessimistic about her own survival through the winter and appeals to Eliot once again by imagining the "green shoots" of tomorrow bursting forth from the body of today. The tomorrow she dreams of is not hers but ours, her readers.

Conclusion: Shāmlū's and Farrukhzād's Transnational Poetics of Death

Whereas death opens a revolutionary gate in Shāmlū's early poetry, Farrukhzād tirelessly struggles to come to terms with its equivocal nature in her later work. In either case, these two poets developed on the myths of death and rebirth that played a part not only in Nīmā's first modernist poems but also in the planetary spread of modernism. These myths did not begin in any one place or within one literary tradition but rather took on new lives as modernists worldwide sought inspiration for their art during their encounters with modernity. Uncertain of what new terrors lay hidden in the technological advances of the twentieth century and in the

[435] Farrukhzād, *Īmān biyāvarīm*, 42-43; *Another Birth: Selected Poems of Forugh Farrokhzad*, 73. Translation modified.

aftermath of the First and then the Second World War, modernist poets like Nīmā, Shāmlū, and Farrukhzād had to square off with death in their poetry.

Nīmā's "The Phoenix" heralded the dawn of the new modernist movement in Iran, and Shāmlū followed soon after to transform the poetic confrontation with death into a revolutionary call to arms. Once the coup against Mosaddegh disabused the Iranian Left of hopes in a Communist future, Shāmlū's poetry matured, and death took on a less-defined role within it. By the 1960s, the modernists' questioning of the myths of death and rebirth had made their poetic function ambiguous.

Shāmlū's and Farrukhzād's poetry is openly transnational in its interactions with the European poetic tradition. Shāmlū evokes the scene of Lorca's death in "Song of a Man Who Killed Himself" to poetically represent his own political change from Romantic to committed, revolutionary poet. While Shāmlū's engagement with the worldwide modernist movement coincided with his leftist political sympathies during the early 1950s, his transnational literary interests contributed to his later poetic sensibilities as well. Likewise, Farrukhzād's enthusiastic readings of European modernist poetry had a profound impact on her later poetic career. Still, she remained indebted to the premodern Persian poetic tradition just as Shāmlū did. During her very last years, Farrukhzād continued to compose poetry grounded in the *ʿarūż*, though she pushed them to their breaking point. Her metrical innovations are not the only feature connecting her poetry to the planetary modernist movement, as she also embraced modernist themes that moved transnationally across the planet, such as the cycle of death and rebirth and the search for meaning in modern life.

Farrukhzād's final poem, an ambivalent confrontation with death, plays on death's abstruse place in a modern Iranian culture subjected to intense social and economic changes

driven by capitalism. While the poems in Shāmlū's *Manifesto* use death to another purpose (a call to revolution), Farrukhzād's meditations on death in "Let Us Believe in the Beginning of the Cold Season" reveal what it means to truly live by investigating what it might mean to die. Whereas Shāmlū's political commitment in the *Qaṭʿnāmah* is explicit, Farrukhzād extends the modernist ambiguities that defined the mid-career poetry of Nīmā and that of earlier European modernists. I read Farrukhzād's later poetry as the zenith of Persian poetic modernism due to her expert ability in combining modernist themes based on the death and rebirth cycle with subtle references to the premodern Persian poetic tradition and European modernism. Her shrewd critique of the various transformations capitalism wreaks in modern Iranian society largely avoids the directly political approach of Shāmlū in the *Manifesto*. "Let Us Believe in the Beginning of the Cold Season" is thus a preeminent example of autonomous art in the modern Persian poetic tradition and a poem that ought to find its place within the planetary canon of modernist literature.

Chapter Five

ʿAbd al-Wahhāb al-Bayātī's Poetics of Myth and Transnational Commitment

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أرى العَنْقاءَ تَكْبُرُ أن تُصادا فعانِدْ مَنْ تُطيقُ لهُ عِنادا

I understand that the Phoenix is too big to hunt,
so be headstrong in taking on what you can.

- Al-Maʿarrī (d. 1057)

وقال لي إياكَ فالعنقاء
تَكْبُرُ إن تُصادْ
فَعُدْ إلى المقابر
والكتب الصفراء والمحابر
من بلد لبلد مهاجر

And he told me, "Take heed, for the Phoenix
is too big to hunt
So go back to the graves,
the yellowed books, and the inkwells
Keep moving from one country to another."

- ʿAbd al-Wahhāb al-Bayātī (d. 1999)

Building on al-Sayyāb's and al-Malāʾikah's earlier modernist experiments, Iraqi poet ʿAbd al-Wahhāb al-Bayātī also drew on the image of the Phoenix to create his poetics of myth. In his 1968 collection *al-Mawt fī al-ḥayāh* (*Death in Life*), the second poem is titled "*al-ʿAnqā*" ("The Phoenix"). Al-Bayātī here employs a *taḍmīn*, a poetic quotation,[436] from the noted eleventh century poet and skeptic Abū al-ʿAlāʾ al-Maʿarrī, including—word for word—part of one of his verses at the end of the poem. "And [Abū al-ʿAlāʾ] told me, 'Take heed, for the Phoenix / is too big to hunt / So go back to the graves, / the yellowed books, and the inkwells / Keep moving from one country to another.'"[437] By borrowing from al-Maʿarrī's line ("I

[436] G.J.H. van Gelder, "*Taḍmīn*," *EI2*. http://dx.doi.org/10.1163/1573-3912_islam_SIM_7284.

[437] ʿAbd al-Wahhāb al-Bayātī, *al-Aʿmāl al-shiʿriyyah*, Vol. 2 (Bayrūt: al-Muʾassasah al-ʿArabiyyah li-l-Dirāsāt wa-l-Nashr, 1995), 132.

understand that the Phoenix is too big to hunt, so be headstrong in taking on what you can"),[438] the poem spurs its speaker onward to keep him writing despite the impossibility of sparking the revolution he hopes for, a challenge it equates to hunting the elusive Phoenix. This poem, along with other modernist Arabic poetry from after 1967, reveals how Arab poets had begun to question the utility of rebirth motifs much more directly than their forebears ever did. It also alludes to its author's peripatetic life, "moving from one country to another."

In this chapter, I look to al-Bayātī's poetry and its multiple and frequent references not only to the Arabic poetic past through the use of *taḍmīn* but also to the Persian philosophical and mystical tradition. Following a brief introduction of the poet, his poetry, and his place within the planetary modernist movement, I investigate the role of another *taḍmīn* in an early collection to explain how al-Bayātī's continual returns to the historical and mythic pasts of the Near East give him the structural base upon which his poetics lie. *Taḍmīn* thus functions as the primary rhetorical device organizing my analysis of al-Bayātī's poetry, for, as I will argue below, it represents in microcosm al-Bayātī's modernist poetics. I expand the concept of *taḍmīn* to an examination of al-Bayātī's broader poetic project of mythic commitment. I read his use of ʿUmar al-Khayyām and Manṣūr al-Ḥallāj as masks and his long engagement of the Persian poetic tradition in his poetry as a technique that keeps his poetry from sinking to the level of straightforward commitment but allows him to nevertheless address his verse to political issues. To conclude the chapter, I argue that his inclusion of the Persian poetic and mythic traditions in his poetics of myth is absolutely central to a transnational commitment that exceeds the limited borders of Iraqi nationalism.

[438] The Arabic is "*arā 'l-ʿanqāʾa takburu an tuṣādā fa-ʿānid man tuṭīqu la-hu ʿināda*n." *Dīwān Abī al-ʿAlāʾ al-Maʿarrī al-mashhūr bi-saqṭ al-zand*, Shākir Shuqayr ed. (Bayrūt: al-Maktabah al-Waṭaniyyah, 1884), 35.

Al-Bayātī and Transnational Modernism in the Near East

Al-Bayātī arrived on the Iraqi modernist poetic scene soon after al-Sayyāb and al-Malāʾikah's pioneering efforts at the end of the 1940s, and his poetic career parallels that of the Iranian Aḥmad Shāmlū in many respects. They were born a year apart (Shāmlū in 1925; al-Bayātī in 1926), and they died a year apart as well, al-Bayātī in 1999 and Shāmlū in 2000. Over their lengthy poetic careers, both Shāmlū and al-Bayātī expanded on the earlier modernists' use of myth while also staying faithful to their leftist political beliefs. Having just discussed how Shāmlū went about presenting himself in his poetry as a committed modernist poet, I now consider selections of al-Bayātī's poetry and a dramatic work from the 1950s and 1960s. His poems fall between explicit political commitment in the vein of Shāmlū in the *Manifesto* and Farrukhzād's ambivalence about the relationship of poetry and politics. Al-Bayātī's existentialism—a result of the philosophical movement having gained popularity in Iraq, and Baghdad in particular, during the 1950s and 1960s[439]—helped him to create a poetics of myth that delicately balances the explicit commitment found in his earlier poetry with the disconnection of "art for art's sake" from reality. By using al-Khayyām and al-Ḥallāj as poetic

[439] Al-Bayātī's poetic and philosophical sensibilities coalesced during a transitional period in Arab history when Arab thinkers found themselves highly influenced by European art and thought but also opposed to the ongoing European colonial projects in the Near East and elsewhere as a Third World consciousness began to take shape. In 1944, ʿAbd al-Raḥmān Badawī (d. 2002) defended his doctoral dissertation, *al-Zaman al-Wujūdī* (*Existential Time*) in Egypt, one of the most important events in contemporary Arab philosophy. Badawī's thought proved foundational in al-Bayātī's worldview because he introduced the Arab world to a new trend in European philosophy: existentialism. While existentialism had already gotten the attention of a number of Arab writers in the 1950s, including Ṭāhā Ḥusayn and Maḥmūd al-Masʿadī, by the 1960s when al-Bayātī had matured as a poet there was a "dominant presence of existentialism" among intellectuals in Baghdad, and, indeed, "the Iraqi existentialist community had no counterpart elsewhere in the Arab world." Yoav Di-Capua, "Arab Existentialism: An Invisible Chapter in the Intellectual History of Decolonization," *American Historical Review* 117, no. 4, 1082. Also see Ḥusayn and al-Masʿadī's correspondence about the "Islamicization of existentialism." Ṭāhā Ḥusayn, "*al-Sudd: taḥlīl wa-naqd*," Maḥmūd al-Masʿadī, *al-Sudd*, 2nd ed. (Tūnis: Dār al-Tūnisiyyah li-l-nashr, 1974 [1955]), 213.

masks (two historical/mythical figures popular in the modern Persian literary tradition), he links his poetry to the cultural past of the Near East yet still makes it relevant in the present moment.

Al-Bayātī's fascination with myths of death and rebirth began during childhood. His mother and grandmother's stories told of poor people's suffering across the ages, their continual hopes for a savior always ending once again in misery. As he listened to these tales of sorrow, he began to "feel that the time which humanity lived within was circular more than it was linear because linear time cannot repeat itself. I was no longer content with the tale, story, fable, or anecdote. Instead, I searched for what lay behind each of them, seeking out the creative forces that drove such and such a behavior, viewpoint, or story."[440]

After al-Bayātī's poetic sensibilities had fully formed, he began to push the boundaries of the Arab modernists' notions about myth. *A Trial in Nishapur*, a play he wrote in 1962, "opened for al-Bayātī the possibility of a new style in his poetry—the style of speaking through a persona, through a mask, and of remaining objective while dealing with burning issues of the day, even as he appeared to be dealing with issues of past history."[441] "The mask," al-Bayātī explains, "is the name through which the poet himself speaks, detached from his own subjectivity. That is, the poet goes about creating a future existence independent of himself […]."[442] By putting on the mask of an historical or mythical figure (or someone who might be both, like al-Khayyām) and addressing that figure's experience of life to the contemporary world—whether directly or implicitly—he not only breathes new life into the memory of that person but also regenerates their revolutionary spirit for the modern age. The mask is thus a reminder of death and also a

[440] Al-Bayātī, *Yanābīʿ al-shams*, 15.

[441] Boullata, "The Masks of ʿAbd al-Wahhāb al-Bayātī," 108.

[442] *Tajribatī al-shiʿriyyah*, 35.

symbol of what the revolutionary figure achieved in life. Whereas al-Bayātī's use of *taḍmīn* revives and reconstitutes single lines of premodern poetry in a contemporary context, his use of masks does the same with the entire historical weight of revolutionary figures from the Near Eastern past.

It is therefore productive to consider al-Bayātī's use of poetic masks not as a way to avoid confronting reality by retreating into history but, on the contrary, as a tool of existential commitment. It is a method for admitting one's own limitations as an individual with a single life path to follow while also harnessing the symbolic power of exemplary revolutionaries from history. His use of the mask is at one and the same time an admission of the limitations the poet faces and an attempt to overcome them by infusing the poem with the memory of the figure the mask represents.

The existing scholarship on al-Bayātī's use of al-Khayyām as a mask often betrays its underlying political motivations by envisaging the latter as a mystical opponent of tyranny. For instance, Aida Azouqa casts al-Bayātī's wearing of the al-Khayyām mask in terms of Sufism, as oriented toward eventual union with the Divine and uninterested in the illusory *dunyā* (the base and lowly world). She argues that the al-Khayyām mask helps al-Bayātī expose the illusoriness of the *dunyā* and imagine the ultimate victory of justice over oppression.[443]

I give a new perspective on al-Bayātī's invocation of the Persian poet by offering an alternative to this reading of al-Khayyām as a Sufi. Working transnationally, I incorporate into my analysis contemporary Iranian perceptions of al-Khayyām, which were in turn informed by

[443] See Azouqa, "Al-Bayyātī and W.B. Yeats as Mythmakers," 258-290 and Azouqa, "Defamiliarization in the Poetry of ʿAbd al-Wahhāb al-Bayātī and T.S. Eliot," 167-211. Cf. also Simawe, "The Lives of the Sufi Masters in ʿAbd al-Wahhāb al-Bayātī's Poetry," 119-141.

the poet's reception in Europe through Edward FitzGerald's (d. 1883) translations of his quatrains.[444] By considering al-Bayātī's use of the al-Khayyām mask in light of the modern Iranian tradition, it becomes clear that the poet appeals to al-Khayyām's poetry and thought as an alternative to the Sufi worldview.

The Persian tradition al-Bayātī draws from looks to al-Khayyām's obsession with worldly life rather than his wishes for future union with the Divine. Al-Bayātī's Sufi themes instead develop out of his use of the al-Ḥallāj mythos, which parallels Nīmā's incorporation of al-Ḥallāj's passion into his poetry. Al-Ḥallāj's presence, then, imbues al-Bayātī's poetry with a distinctly Persian mystical pedigree while al-Khayyām takes on the role of an existential hero—not a Sufi.

Al-Bayātī's poetic masks are representations of "the revolutionary in continual revolution" (*al-thawrī fī al-thawrah al-mustamirrah*),[445] examples of authentic life in the face of certain death. His poetry answers Sartre's call for commitment, but not exactly in the way Sartre intended. Especially after the more straightforwardly committed poems from his early collections (*Broken Pitchers* [1954] through *Fire and Words* [1964]), his poetry became less openly committed (though not always) and closer to what Theodor Adorno calls "autonomous works of art." I have already discussed Adorno's argument about the efficacy (or lack thereof) of fully committed art versus "a work of art that is content to be a fetish"[446] in my first chapter, but I would like to turn once more to the questions I posed there, asking them of al-Bayātī's work:

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[444] For instance, Ṣādiq Hidāyat's (d. 1951) sustained fascination with al-Khayyām's *Rubāʿiyyāt* was spurred on by European interest in the poet and has played a central part in how al-Khayyām is understood in Iran today. Afshin Molavi, *The Soul of Iran: A Nation's Struggle for Freedom* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2002), 111.

[445] Al-Bayātī, *Tajribatī al-shiʿriyyah*, 35. For a periodization of al-Bayātī's poetry, one of which is "the phase of total and continuous revolution" from 1965-1979, see Rizk, "The Poetry of 'Abd al-Wahhab al-Bayati," 22.

[446] Adorno, "Commitment," 177.

Does some art have *more* political meaning or function *better* politically than other art? As I show in my readings below, the answer is yes, but, as I have argued throughout the dissertation, we must be careful in our approach and avoid assigning our own political motives to art.

Obviously-committed art requires no interpretation and is, to my mind, less meaningful than autonomous art due to the ease with which it is understood. We pass by and then forget it. It may not be content to be art for its own sake, but it still fades into the background of experience. Discussing art in Germany, Adorno puts it as follows:

> [C]ommitment often means bleating what everyone is already saying or at least secretly wants to hear. The notion of a 'message' in art, even when politically radical, already contains an accommodation to the world: the stance of the lecturer conceals a clandestine entente with the listeners, who could only be rescued from deception by refusing it.[447]

Al-Bayātī's move into existentialism, which we can trace throughout his work in his adoption of the poetic mask and presentations of the radical possibilities that emerge once we accept the inevitability of death, marks his shift away from open commitment to the more ambiguous (but I would argue more politically-relevant and meaningful) category of autonomous art.

Before returning to the central role *taḍmīn* plays in al-Bayātī's poetry and expanding my reading of *taḍmīn* to his incorporations of al-Khayyām and al-Ḥallāj, I would like to point out that al-Bayātī is the most obvious candidate among the modern Arab poets for transnational analysis. After the publication of his breakthrough collection *Abārīq muhashshamah* (*Broken Pitchers*) in 1954, he was forced to leave Iraq in 1955 because of his involvement with the Iraqi Communist Party.[448] For much of his life after that, he traveled and lived abroad, moving among

[447] Adorno, "Commitment," 193.

[448] For instance, he edited the popular Iraqi leftist cultural journal *al-Taqāfah al-jadīdah* (*The New Culture*).

the continents of Africa, Asia, and Europe and taking up residence in Cairo, Moscow, and Madrid. His itinerant life prompted a flurry of academic interest in his work.[449] He counted among his friends and acquaintances not only other Arab writers and poets—including but not limited to al-Sayyāb (who became a decidedly vicious enemy of his later on), Louis Awad, Ṣāliḥ Jawdat (d. 1976), Tawfīq al-Ḥakīm (d. 1987), Yaḥyā Ḥaqqī (d. 1992), Khalīl Ḥāwī (d. 1982), and even Najīb Maḥfūẓ (d. 2006)—but also foreigners such as Rafael Alberti (d. 1999), Robert Lowell (d. 1977), Gabriel Garcia Marquez (d. 2014), and Nâzım Hikmet (d. 1963), whose funeral he attended as a pallbearer.[450] After the end of the Iraqi monarchy in 1958, he was appointed as a cultural attaché and spent much of his time in Moscow from 1959-1964 before moving to Cairo, where he lived from 1964-1971. Years later, he would move to Madrid, which was his base from 1979-1989. In the last year of his life, he finally visited the country whose culture had so inspired his poetry throughout his career, traveling to Iran only a few months before his 1999 death in Damascus, Syria.[451]

He may have become enthralled with Iranian culture and literature through his early readings of al-Khayyām, Jāmī, Rūmī, and ʿAṭṭār, as he relates in his autobiography.[452] Or perhaps it was a youthful infatuation with one of his classmates (the daughter of the Iranian

[449] One of the poet's harsher critics claims, "Obsessively self-promoting all his life, al-Bayātī had a shrewd talent for effective networking to promote his poetry, as can be seen from the hundreds of studies written on him. Still another reason is the tendency of the international left and of the socialist realist school to inflate any exiled mediocre poet from the Third World, evaluating his or her poetry according to political commitment. And lastly, some of the problem may be attributable to the tendency of Western scholars to become fascinated with exotic foreign writers without adequate understanding of the cultural contexts." Simawe, "The Lives of the Sufi Masters," 120.

[450] Al-Bayātī, *Yanābīʿ al-shams*, 97.

[451] Nāṣir Muḥsinī'niyā and Sipīdah Akhavān Māsūlah, "*Bāztāb-i farhang va adab-i Īrān dar shiʿr-i ʿAbd al-Wahhāb al-Bayātī*," *Kāvishnāmah-'i adabiyyāt-i taṭbīqī (muṭālaʿāt-i taṭbīqī-'i ʿarabī — fārsī)*, Dānishkadah-'i Adabiyyāt va ʿUlūm-i Insānī, Dānishgāh-'i Rāzī Kirmānshāh, 3, no. 12 (Zamistān [Winter], 1392; 2014), 97.

[452] Al-Bayātī, *Yanābīʿ al-shams*, 27.

cultural attaché in Baghdad)[453] at the Baghdad Teachers College that led him to engage, for the entire length of his poetic career, with Iran in his poetry. Iranian scholarship on him has taken particular notice of his references to Iranian culture and cultural figures and studied them.[454] As you flip through his *dīwān*, you sense a distinct Persian presence both in the masks the poet puts on and the cities he sets many of his poems in. Al-Khayyām first appears as a character in 1957's *Ashʿār fī al-manfā* (*Poems in Exile*) in the poem "*al-Rajul alladhī kāna yughannī*" ("The Man Who Was Singing"); 1965's *Sifr al-faqr wa-l-thawrah* (*Book of Poverty and Revolution*) includes "*ʿAdhāb al-Ḥallāj*" ("The Passion of al-Ḥallāj"), a poem in six parts that roughly follow the path of a Sufi seeker (*murīd*) and end with al-Ḥallāj's execution on the order of the Abbasid caliphate.[455] Later poems with Persian-influenced themes or persons include "*al-Majūsī*" ("The

[453] "A secret al-Bayātī kept for over fifty years, Furūzandah: the spark of lost love," Qāsim al-Buraysīm wrote in the pages of *al-Raʾī*. Quoted in ʿAbd al-Riḍā ʿAlī, *Alladhī akalat al-qawāfī lisānahu wa-ākharūn: shakhṣiyyāt wa-mawāqif fī al-shiʿr wa-l-naqd wa-l-kitābah* (Bayrūt: al-Muʾassasah al-ʿArabiyyah li-l-Dirāsāt wa-l-Nashr, 2009), 58. Al-Bayātī dedicated his final poem, *Bukāʾiyyah ilā Ḥāfiẓ al-Shīrāzī* (1st ed. [Bayrūt: Dār al-Kunūz al-Adabiyyah, 1999]) to Furūzandah, finally exposing his secret. See also Muḥsinīniyā and Māsūlah, "*Bāztāb*," 101-102.

[454] See Aḥmad Nuhayrāt, "*Shakhṣiyyāt Īrāniyyah fi dīwān ʿAbd al-Wahhāb al-Bayātī*," *Majallat al-jamʿiyyah al-ʿilmiyyah al-Īrāniyyah li-l-lughah al-ʿarabiyyah wa-ādābihā* 9, no. 26 (al-Rabīʿ [Spring] 1392; 2013), 1-28; ʿĪsā Mutaqqā'zādah and ʿAlī Bashīrī, "*al-Athr al-fārisī fī shiʿr ʿAbd al-Wahhāb al-Bayātī*," *Iḍāʾāt naqdiyyah* 2, no. 6 (Ṣayf [Summer] 1391; Ḥazīrān [June] 2012), 129-150; Nāhidah Fawzī, Maryam Amjad, and Kubrā Rawshanfikr, "*Barrasī'i shiʿr-i Muḥammad Riżā Shafīʿī-Kadkanī va ʿAbd al-Wahhāb al-Bayātī az manẓar-i adabiyyāt-i taṭbīqī*, *Pazhūhash-hā-yi adabiyyāt-i taṭbīqī* 2, nos. 1-3 (Bahār va Tābistān [Spring and Summer] 1393 [2014]), 79-97; and Kubrā Rawshanfikr and Sajjād Ismāʿīlī, "*Barrasī-'i taṭbīqī-'i nūstālzhī dar shiʿr-i ʿAbd al-Wahhāb al-Bayātī va Shafīʿī Kadkanī*," *Dūfaṣlnāmah-'i ʿilmī — pazhūhashī-'i pazhūhash-hā-yi adabiyyāt-i taṭbīqī* 2, nos. 2-4 (Pāyīz va Zamistān [Fall and Winter] 1393 [2014-2015]), 27-55. Nāhidah Fawzī has also individually written "*Hājis al-ightirāb wa-l-tarḥāl ʿinda ʿAbd al-Wahhāb al-Bayātī," Majallat Markaz Dirāsāt al-Kūfah* 1, no. 21 (2011), 25-44 and *ʿAbd al-Wahhāb al-Bayātī ḥayātuh wa-shiʿiruh (dirāsah naqdiyyah)* (Tihrān: Intishārāt-i Sār Allāh, 1383 [2004/05]). Additionally, Muḥammad Riżā Shafīʿī-Kadkanī has translated al-Bayātī in *Avāz-hā-yi Sindibād*, 2nd ed. ([Tihrān]: Intishārāt-i Nīl, 2536 [1976/77]; originally published in 1348 [1969/70]). Al-Bayātī knew of Kadkanī's translation and mentions that it "received lots of attention in the Persian literary scene" for its second printing that followed the Islamic Revolution, after which "other books [of his] were published in Persian translation, including *ʿUyūn al-kilāb al-mayyitah* (*Eyes of Dead Dogs*), *Ashʿār fī al-manfā*, and *Qamar Shīrāz*." ʿAbd al-Wahhāb al-Bayātī, *Mudun wa-rijāl wa-matāhāt* (Bayrūt: Dār al-Kunūz al-Adabiyyah, 1999), 112.

[455] ʿAbd al-Wahhāb al-Bayātī, *Sifr al-faqr wa-l-thawrah: shiʿr*, 1st ed. (Bayrūt: Dār al-Ādāb, 1965), 9-30. For a discussion of the various parts of the poem, see Boullata, "The Masks of ʿAbd al-Wahhāb al-Bayātī," 111-113.

Magus")[456] and "*Hakādhā qāl Zarādusht*" ("Thus Spake Zarathustra")[457] from *al-Kitābah ʿalā al-ṭīn* (*Writing on Clay*, 1970); the collection titled *Qamar Shīrāz* (*Shiraz's Moon*, 1975), which includes a poem by the same name;[458] "*Maqāṭiʿ min ʿadhābāt Farīd al-Dīn al-ʿAṭṭār*" ("Selections from the Passions of Farīd al-Dīn al-ʿAṭṭār") in *Mamlakat al-sunbulah* (*Kingdom of Grain*, 1979);[459] and one of his final poems, "*Bukāʾiyyah ilā Ḥāfiẓ al-Shīrāzī*" ("A Lament for Hāfiẓ al-Shīrāzī," 1998). Persian cities other than Shīrāz also appear in his poetry: Iṣfahān, Nīshāpūr, and Tehran.[460] He drew much poetic inspiration from the Persian tradition, though his journeys did not physically take him to Iran until the very end of his life. His interest in Iran came instead from his long study of Persian culture through books, particularly Persian philosophy and poetry that had been translated into Arabic.

His work is transnational and not international because it is a product of his continual affiliation with movements that developed not out of the international community of nations but rather along with unofficial, transnational trends: existentialism, Sufism, poetic modernism, and (in al-Bayātī's case, unorthodox) Marxism.[461] All of these were mediated by his readings of Arab

[456] Al-Bayātī, *al-Aʿmāl al-shiʿriyyah*, Vol. 2, 203-204. See Bassam K. Frangieh's translation, Abdul Wahab Al-Bayati, *Love, Death and Exile: Poems Translated from the Arabic* (Washington, D.C.: Georgetown University Press, 1990), 35-37.

[457] Al-Bayātī, *al-Aʿmāl al-shiʿriyyah*, Vol. 2, 205-206.

[458] *Qamar Shīrāz*, al-Bayātī, *al-Aʿmāl al-shiʿriyyah*, Vol. 2, 359-392; Frangieh's translation is *Love, Death and Exile*, 209-217.

[459] Al-Bayātī, *al-Aʿmāl al-shiʿriyyah*, Vol. 2, 405-408; Frangieh's translation is *Love, Death and Exile*, 249-255.

[460] "Your eyes are Isfahan (*ʿaynāk 'Iṣfahān*')" al-Bayātī writes in "To Hind," a poem to his wife. Al-Bayātī, *al-Aʿmāl al-shiʿriyyah*, Vol. 2, 55-56. Nishapur figures prominently in al-Bayātī's work, most obviously in his 1962 play *Muḥākamah fī Nīsābūr* (Tūnis: al-Dār al-Tūnisiyyah li-l-Nashr, 1973). "At the gates of Tehran, we saw him…" is the opening line to "*al-Rajul alladhī kāna yughannī*," *al-Aʿmāl al-shiʿriyyah*, Vol. 1, 280.

[461] Al-Bayātī explains his ideology as follows, "From the ideological side, I am a progressive (*taqaddumī*)—without being a Marxist—and a Muslim Arab. Ideology does not impose its own terms." *Yanābīʿ al-shams*, 11. Still, critics have long noted that "Al-Bayātī is regarded as the foremost representative of the socialist realist school in modern

and Persian cultural heritage (*al-turāth* in the Arabic tradition). While his exile may have been the result of changing internal and external politics in Iraq and the Near East, the poetry he produced within it was transnational in its negotiations of places, times, and philosophies. It reached outside the bounds of the Iraqi national context despite his sometime involvement in the Iraqi government's cultural program (for example, during his time as cultural attaché and professor in Moscow).[462] His own presentations of his literary horizons were wide-ranging, and we might take as an example the epigraphs at the beginning of his 1968 autobiography—another, *Yanābīʿ al-shams* (*Springs of the Sun*), appeared in 1999—which includes quotes from the Persian mystic and philosopher al-Suhrawardī (d. 1191),[463] Boris Pasternak (d. 1960), Anton Chekhov (d. 1904), and Jalāl al-Dīn Rūmī. Elsewhere in the book, he quotes from the Chilean painter Roberto Matta (d. 2002), Fidel Castro (d. 2016), Alfred de Musset (d. 1857), Marcelle Auclair (d. 1983), Bertolt Brecht (d. 1956), Molière (d. 1673), Rabindranath Tagore (d. 1941), Ranier Maria Rilke (d. 1926), and Constantine Cavafy (d. 1933)—and that is only if we limit ourselves to chapter epigraphs.[464] Particularly prominent within his reserve of cultural inspirations is the tradition of Persian philosophy and mysticism, which he combined with his understanding of European existentialism to create a transnational poetics of myth.

Arabic poetry." *Anthology of Modern Arabic Poetry*, Mounah A. Khouri and Hamid Algar eds. and trans. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1974), 241.

[462] For a career timeline in al-Bayātī's own hand, see the letter appended to Khalil Shukrallah Rizk's "The Poetry of ʻAbd al-Wahhab al-Bayati: Thematic and Stylistic Study," PhD diss. (Indiana University, 1981), 292-298. Rizk has also published in Arabic a study of al-Bayātī's style. Khalīl Rizq, *Shiʿr ʿAbd al-Wahhāb al-Bayātī fī dirāsah uslūbiyyah, 1945-1979* (Bayrūt: Muʾassasat al-Ashraf, 1995).

[463] Who was put to death by the Ayyūbid sultan Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn. H. Ziai, "al-Suhrawardī," *EI2*. http://dx.doi.org/10.1163/1573-3912_islam_COM_1107.

[464] Al-Bayātī, *Tajribatī al-shiʿriyyah*, 7, 11, 29, 49, 67, 85, 87, 103, and 105.

The Function of Taḍmīn *(Quoting) in al-Bayātī's Poetry*

Although al-Bayātī's literary scope encompassed a broad swath of cultural and linguistic traditions, his primary source of poetic inspiration was Arabic literature. He continually returns to his own tradition to imbue his verse with resonances from deep within Arab cultural history. The most obvious of the techniques he uses to do so is *taḍmīn*, or—loosely—"quoting," a technique we find across the modernist tradition but with a particular function in Arabic poetry. Teasing out the function of *taḍmīn* is perhaps the most important task for the critic when analyzing early examples of modernist Arabic poetry. As Snir argues in the case of al-Bayātī's use of *taḍmīn* in the poem *Broken Pitchers*, we must pay close attention to intertextual citations of Arab poetic and cultural heritage in order to understand the full meaning of a poem.[465] In *Broken Pitchers*, for instance, the formal elements of a line with a quote from al-Mutanabbī undergird the quotation's central function in the poem, fully integrating the quoted line (which is from a poem in a different meter!) into the new poem. Furthermore, al-Bayātī pushes the integrated line almost to its breaking point by splitting one of the feet between two lines of poetry (the fourth and fifth lines below), a novel technique that Adūnīs later used to much effect in his groundbreaking collection *Aghānī Mihyār al-Dimashqī* (*Songs of Mihyār the Damascene*) in 1961.[466]

The poem opens:

Allāhu, wa-l-ufqu[467] *'l-munawwaru, wa-l-ʿabīd*
yataḥassasūna quyūdahum:

[465] Sanīr, *Rakʿatān fī al-ʿishq*, 47.

[466] See Adūnīs [ʿAlī Aḥmad Saʿīd Isbar], *Aghānī Mihyār al-Midashqī* (Bayrūt: Manshūrāt Dar al-Ādāb, 1988 [1961]). The translation of the *Aghānī* is Adonis, *Mihyar of Damascus, His Songs: Poems by Adonis*, Adnan Haydar and Michael Beard trans. (Rochester, NY: BOA Editions, Ltd., 2008).

[467] Al-Bayātī uses an accepted variant of the word, normally *ufuq*, due to the meter.

‘shayyid madāʾinaka ’l-ghadāh
bi-l-qurbi min burkāni Fīzūfin, wa-lā taqnaʿ
bi-mā dūna ’n-nujūm
wa-li-yuḍrama ’l-ḥubbu ’l-ʿanīf
fī qalbika ’n-nīrāni wa-l-farḥi ’l-ʿamīq’[468]

Though it is difficult to reflect the use of *taḍmīn* and the innovative enjambment of the foot between lines 4 and 5, I offer this translation to show how the *taḍmīn* fits seamlessly into the poem’s meaning:

God, the glowing horizon, and the slaves
feel the weight of their chains:
‘Build your cities in the morning
beside the volcano, Vesuvius, and do not be content
with anything less than the stars.
Let violent love light
fires and boundless joy in your heart.’

Snir provides a full metrical breakdown of the poem, which shows al-Bayātī’s novel method of enjambment. Here again, the “ / ” indicates the separations between poetic feet. The poem is in the *kāmil* (perfect) meter,[469] a favorite of al-Bayātī and the other pioneers of Arabic modernist poetry. It generally consists of four repetitions of the foot *mutafāʿilun* (˘ ˘ ¯ ˘ ¯) or a variant *mutfāʿilun* (¯ ¯ ˘ ¯). Al-Bayātī uses both in this poem, like so:

¯ ¯ ˘ ¯ / ¯ ¯ ˘ ¯ / ˘ ˘ ¯ ˘ ¯
˘ ˘ ¯ ˘ ¯ / ˘ ˘ ¯ ˘ ¯
¯ ¯ ˘ ¯ / ˘ ˘ ¯ ˘ ¯
¯ ¯ ˘ ¯ / ¯ ¯ ˘ ¯ / ¯ ¯ ˘ ¯ / ¯ ¯
˘ ¯ / ¯ ¯ ˘ ¯
¯ ¯ ˘ ¯ / ¯ ¯ ˘ ¯
¯ ¯ ˘ ¯ / ¯ ¯ ˘ ¯ / ˘ ˘ ¯ ˘ ¯

[468] Al-Bayātī, *al-Aʿmāl al-shiʿriyyah*, Vol. 1, 113.

[469] Wright, *A Grammar of the Arabic Language*, Vol. 2, 362-363.

He splits the first two syllables of the fourth foot of line 4 from the second two, which begin line 5, thus calling the reader's attention to the lines (though someone listening to the poem would not experience the lines in the same way nor would they notice the splitting of the foot). Even if one were not familiar with the reference to al-Mutanabbī, the enjambment of the poetic foot signals to the reader that something noteworthy is happening in these lines. The line quoted from here is "*idhā ghāmarta fī sharafin marūm* // *fa-lā taqnaʿ bi-mā dūna ʾn-nujūm*," with " // " indicating the caesura. The line translates, "Should you go to great lengths in search of a desired honor // do not be content with anything less than the stars."[470] Surprisingly, al-Mutanabbī's poem is not in the *kāmil*, but rather in the *wāfir* (exuberant) meter.[471] The *wāfir* has a variant as well (either ˘ ¯ ¯ ¯ or ˘ ¯ ˘ ˘ ¯), but its feet do not ever exactly match either of the variants found in the *kāmil* (¯ ¯ ˘ ¯ or ˘ ˘ ¯ ˘ ¯). Al-Mutanabbī's line scans: ˘ ¯ ¯ ¯ / ˘ ¯ ˘ ˘ ¯ / ˘ ¯ ¯ // ˘ ¯ ¯ ¯ / ˘ ¯ ¯ ¯ / ˘ ¯ ¯. In splitting the first foot of the second half of al-Mutanabbī's line, al-Bayātī's ingenious *taḍmīn* allows him to incorporate the quotation without breaking from the meter of the new poem.[472] Invoking al-Mutanabbī's line about striving for one's goals and never giving up even in the face of great odds strengthens the wish of the poet in *Broken Pitchers* with the force of the Arabic poetic past. Moreover, the quotation marks denoting another speaker internal to the poem do not demarcate the *taḍmīn* but instead surround a longer demand—from

[470] For the rest of the poem and its explanation, see *Sharḥ dīwān al-Mutanabbī*, waḍaʿah ʿAbd al-Raḥmān al-Barqūqī, rājaʿah wa-faharasah Dr. Yūsuf al-Shaykh Muḥammad al-Buqāʿī, Vol. 1 (Bayrūt: Dār al-Kātib al-ʿArabī, 2010), 391-392.

[471] Wright, *A Grammar of the Arabic Language*, Vol. 2, 363.

[472] In *Yanābīʿ al-shams*, al-Bayātī brags about his knowledge of the *ʿarūḍ* in a short anecdote from his time in Egypt. "Every time we met, [the Egyptian poet] Ṣāliḥ Jawdat would speak with me endlessly about modern poetry. I remember once when I had published a *qaṣīdah ʿamūdiyyah* (poem in the standard premodern columnar form) in *Death in Life,* and he thought that it was written in *taf ʿīlah* (foot-based meter). I insisted that it was columnar, and once I explained to him how it was so, I discovered that he didn't know anything at all about the Arabic *ʿarūḍ*. He was surprised by my knowledge of the *ʿarūḍ*." 71. Text between parentheses added.

whom we cannot be sure. The poet takes on al-Mutanabbī's voice and adds the speaker's to it, following the traditional requirements of *taḍmīn* while also bringing the premodern Arabic poetic tradition into the avant-garde of the new modernist poetic movement.

I have spent so much space discussing this single instance of *taḍmīn* in al-Bayātī's poetry because it represents his poetic modernist project in miniature. First of all, he draws on a wide variety of poetic and cultural traditions in his verse, and he combines these influences with his unabashed political commitment to Communist ideals (though not necessarily to any particular party line, whether in Iraq or the Soviet Union). In fact, though he had already been thrown in prison prior to publishing *Broken Pitchers*, its appearance brought the poet once again to the attention of the Iraqi government. He was eventually dismissed from his teaching job at a public school and forced into exile due to the political stance he took against the monarchy in the collection. His project was thus revolutionary in ways other than his unique use of poetic form, and the poet never gave up on the aspirations he laid out in poems such as the one I quoted from above. We must remember that al-Bayātī, like Nīmā, al-Sayyāb, and other modernists who experimented with changing the premodern *ʿarūḍ* system, did not consider these developments to be the central revolutionary criteria for their poetry. Al-Bayātī, for instance, writes that "making poetry new (*al-tajdīd fī al-shiʿr*) is not so much a revolution against *ʿarūḍ*, meters (*al-awzān*), and rhymes—as some imagine—as much as it is a revolution of expression (*thawrah fī al-taʿbīr*)."[473]

Secondly, it is productive to consider his use of the historical and mythical figures he puts on as poetic masks in terms of *taḍmīn* as well. The seamless integration of al-Mutanabbī's line above works similarly to how he goes about bringing al-Khayyām, al-Ḥallāj, and other figures

[473] *Tajribatī al-shiʿriyyah*, 38.

from premodern Near Eastern history and myth into his poems, updating the mythical stories surrounding them to tackle the issues of the present day.

A Revolutionary Poetics of Myth: The Al-Khayyām Mythos in al-Bayāti's Poetry

To return to the title of the collection I began this chapter with, *Death in Life*, it is important to note that al-Bayātī's acceptance of death as the defining element of existentialism does not necessarily always negate the usefulness of thinking about death in terms of rebirth. In fact, he offers a novel take on rebirth *within life* in his autobiography when he writes about moving to Cairo, where he felt as if he truly matured as a poet. "When I arrived in Cairo," he recalls, "my spirit was overflowing with bitterness, and I felt as if I would be born again—but I would not be reborn as a person or poet having no relation with the poet I had been before. Instead, a new poet would be reborn from his ashes […]."[474]

He sincerely believed in the possibility of rebirth in life, and though, like a good existentialist, he did not deny the ultimate certainty of death, he never gave in to nihilism. The importance of the reorientation in thought we find in the existential project (whether European or Arab) cannot be overstated in its influence on al-Bayātī's thinking, particularly his existential focus on authentic being. Al-Bayātī explains that by the end of the 1940s he had spent a lot of time reading realist literature (*al-adab al-wāqiʿī*), particularly Gorky's *The Mother*, which he liked because it was "a book that didn't come from books but rather from people's lives and experiences." Following his readings of realism, he says that he

> spent a long time, once again, with existential literature (*al-adab al-wujūdī*), in particular Sartre and Camus. It was the insistence on freedom and the embodiment of the image of the ongoing revolution on the part of mankind, the refusal to be insignificant, superficial, valueless, and apathetic that led me to

[474] *Yanābīʿ al-shams*, 67.

> spend time on the realist existentialists (*al-wāqiʿīn al-wujūdiyyīn*). I felt as if they were returning literature to that full humanist understanding that all great literature had, from the Greeks to the ancient Arabs, returning to the word in order to give it its true meaning by way of people's lives and real experiences. This is how I stumbled upon the answers to many questions I had had no answer to.[475]

Like other Arab modernists, including Adūnīs and Ṣalāḥ ʿAbd al-Ṣabūr, al-Bayātī often also returned to Islamic history to find exemplars of authentic and truly revolutionary life. Most prominent among these symbols of authentic revolution in his poetry are al-Khayyām and al-Ḥallāj, though sevaral other figures show up as well, including the Iranian philosopher al-Suhrawardī, the founder of the philosophical school of Illuminationism (*ʿilm al-ishrāq*).[476]

Al-Bayātī opens his first autobiographical work with an epigraph from al-Suhrawardī's *Ḥikmat al-ishrāq* (*The Philosophy of Illumination*). He considered al-Suhrawardī a revolutionary figure because he was compelled to involve himself and his Philosophy of Illumination in political vicissitudes, in that his philosophy "establishes a connection between political authority, just rule, and the ruler's access to divine light."[477] The Ayyūbid dynasty (r. 1171-1260) eventually executed him for this affront to its authority, leading to his appellation as *al-Maqtūl* (the Slain).[478] Although he does not engage at length with al-Suhrawardī's philosophy in his prose, his brief citations of the philosopher allude to the philosophical underpinnings of al-Bayātī's own thought. Al-Suhrawardī's willingness to die for a belief inspired al-Bayātī's

[475] Al-Bayātī, *Tajribatī al-shiʿriyyah*, 17.

[476] Roxanne Marcotte, "Suhrawardi," *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Fall 2016 Edition), Edward N. Zalta ed., http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/suhrawardi/. Also see H. Ziai, "Illuminationism," *EIr*, XII/6, 670-672 and XIII/1, 1-2, http://www.iranicaonline.org/articles/illuminationism.

[477] Al-Bayātī, *Tajribatī al-shiʿriyyah*, 7.

[478] C. Cahen, "Ayyūbids," *EI2*. http://dx.doi.org/10.1163/1573-3912_islam_SIM_0934.

existential poetics, which he explored at length with one of his favorite mythic masks, the famous skeptic ʿUmar al-Khayyām.

A few introductory notes about al-Khayyām and his presence in al-Bayātī's poetry are in order before I offer my own analysis of his role in one poem in particular. First of all, despite his popularity in both the West and the East and the numerous studies devoted to studying his life and work, ʿUmar al-Khayyām, the author of the famous *Rubāʿiyyāt* (quatrains usually rhyming AABA), probably never actually existed and the poems ascribed to him are likely an amalgamation of the works of numerous authors.[479] Al-Khayyām's popularity skyrocketed in Europe after FitzGerald's translations of his quatrains, which appeared over the course of the latter half of the nineteenth century. Because of the popularity of these translations and subsequent ones in many languages other than English that eventually renewed (created from scratch?) memories of the poet in Iran, "'Khaiyām' exerted a tremendous influence on such major figures of 20th-century Persian literature as Ṣādiq Hidāyat and his name continues to be invoked with passion in the ideological debates that have so shaken the country in the last hundred years."[480] To put aside the question of al-Khayyām's actual existence due to the huge amount of interest he has received from readers and critics, it is clear from both FitzGerald's and the later Iranian critics' understandings of the poet that he was more a skeptic than he was a Sufi.[481] Al-Khayyām's skepticism about religion made his *rubāʿī*s especially attractive to

[479] It is beyond the scope of my project to thoroughly discuss the long history of scholarship on al-Khayyām. This observation is based on François de Blois, *Persian Literature: A Bio-Bibliographical Survey*, *Volume V: Poetry of the Pre-Mongol Period*, 2nd ed. (London: RoutledgeCurzon in association with The Royal Asiatic Society of Great Britain and Ireland, 2004), 299-318; see especially pages 304-305.

[480] de Blois, 306.

[481] Peter Avery writes in the Introduction to his and John Heath-Stubbs's translations of the *Rubāʿiyyāt* that the Sufi poet ʿAṭṭār "described how on reaching God's threshold Khayyam's learning was no substitute for the spiritual grace and faith he lacked. If Khayyam was a Sufi, he was certainly not the sort either ʿAttar or [Sufi scholastic]

Hidāyat (d. 1951). He explains that al-Khayyām's French translator J.B. Nicolas (d. 1875) initially put forward the idea that he was a Sufi poet.[482] In contrast to this interpretation, Hidāyat paints a portrait of al-Khayyām as a materialist philosopher ("*yak fīlsūf-i māddī*") who was "from the days of his youth until the moment of his death a pessimist and a skeptic."[483] Nevertheless, Hidāyat's ideas about al-Khayyām may also have been the result of over-interpreting or emphasizing certain elements of the *Rubāʾiyyāt* that were in line with his own prejudices and beliefs; Hidāyat was famously Islamophobic and a Persian chauvinist, and an irreligious, rationalistic al-Khayyām fit his model for the ideal modern Iranian intellectual.[484] Al-Bayātī's understanding of al-Khayyām grew out of a transnational movement of interest in the poet through both the East and the West during the first half of the twentieth century, and we must consider the possibility that he knew about al-Khayyām the skeptic and incorporated elements of this Persian-inspired al-Khayyām into his poetry.

My entry point into my discussion of al-Khayyām's function in al-Bayātī's verse is Aida Azouqa's analysis of the title poem of 1966's *He Who Comes and Does Not Come*. Like Hidāyat's reading of al-Khayyām above, her interpretation of al-Bayātī's poetry reflects more

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Najmu'd-Din Daya would extol; but *Sufi eclecticism makes it dangerous to be dogmatic about matters of this kind*." *The Ruba'iyat of Omar Khayyam*, Peter Avery and John Heath-Stubbs trans. (London: Penguin Books, 1981), 30. Brackets and italics added.

[482] Ṣādiq Hidāyat, *Tarānah-hā-yi Khayyām: bā shish majlis-i taṣvīr az Darvīsh Naqqāsh* ([Tihrān?]: Intishārāt-i Māh, [1982?; originally published in 1934]), 11.

[483] Hidāyat, *Tarānah-hā-yi Khayyām*, 18.

[484] Lloyd Ridgeon, *Sufi Castigator: Ahmad Kasravi and the Iranian mystical tradition*, Routledge Sufi Series, Ian Richard Netton ed. (London: Routledge Taylor & Francis Group, 2006), 25-26. For more on Hidāyat's hostility to Islam and the Arabs, see Iraj Parsinejad, *A History of Literary Criticism in Iran 1866-1951: Literary Criticism in the Works of Enlightened Thinkers of Iran—Akhundzadeh, Kermani, Malkom, Talebof, Maraghe'i, Kasravi, and Hedayat* (Bethesda, MD: Ibex Publishers, 2002), 201-210. Hidāyat published a first collection of al-Khayyām's poems in 1923, which has been reprinted more recently. See Ṣādiq Hidāyat, *Rubāʿiyyāt-i Ḥakīm ʿUmar Khayyām* (Uppsala: Intishārāt-i Afsānah, 1376 [1997]).

her own political motivations than it discloses anything new about the poem for us. We learn more about the critic than we do about the poem when we read her argument because she situates her understanding of al-Khayyām within a pre-determined and directly political reading of al-Bayātī's motivations for writing the poem.

I have already mentioned the overarching mode of reading we find in scholarship on modern Arabic and Persian literature. Such approaches are founded in allegorical understandings of creative texts that seek to relate texts to the political contexts of their composition. I do not want to dwell further on the shortcomings of contextual models for understanding literature here, but I would like to point out how they limit the interpretive possibilities available to the critic by briefly tracing one such model's results in Azouqa's article "Al-Bayyātī and W.B. Yeats as Mythmakers." For Azouqa's argument to work, al-Khayyām *must* be a Sufi, and she either does not recognize or refuses to consider alternative (and traditionally more widely-accepted) characterizations of al-Khayyām as a rationalist skeptic. Drawing on the work of ʿAzīz al-Sayyid Jāsim,[485] she argues,

> Within the context of Sufi tenets, freedom signifies a rejection of all earthly vanity as transient because the goal of a Sufi, under the impact of Muḥyī al-Dīn Ibn al-ʿArabī, is to attain immortality and unity with the Divine through transcending all material gain. This explains why a Sufi becomes indifferent to tyrannical threats.[486]

The Sufi, therefore, becomes a revolutionary figure, a hero whose "actions can be read allegorically on a *national level* as being the representatives [of] the destiny of their nation; the hardships they face encompass the historical forces that impede the nation's progress."[487]

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[485] *Al-Iltizām wa-l-taṣawwuf fī shiʿr ʿAbd al-Wahhāb al-Bayātī.*

[486] Azouqa, "al-Bayyātī and W.B. Yeats," 260.

[487] Azouqa, "al-Bayyātī and W.B. Yeats," 261. Italics added.

Foregrounding her nationalist reading of al-Khayyām the revolutionary, Azouqa is led to propose that "al-Bayyātī's anxiety over the acquisition of inspiration [through the use of the poetic mask] seems *rather secondary* to the *national concerns* of the poem. For this reason, one can examine the personal level of the poem *only after elucidating its national one* […]."[488] Owing to the lack of evidence Azouqa gives as far as actually connecting the "nationalist concerns" of "He Who Comes and Does Not Come" to the context of its composition, I find it difficult to come to terms with understanding the poem solely as national allegory. In consideration of al-Bayātī's engagement with existential philosophy, I also disagree about approaching the "personal level of the poem" only in regard to its political orientation. Finally, Azouqa's conclusion presents a far too optimistic view of the poem's function (especially in light of the existential questioning—or even angst—that pervades it). Discussing the final lines, she concludes,

> As a fertility goddess, whose resurrection brings rain that revives the land, Aisha symbolizes the deliverance of the motherland, following the rise of Khayyam, the Tammuz and the Orpheus of the poem, to bring Aisha back; Khayyam thus symbolizes the much awaited revolutionary figure who combats evil and *changes the course of the nation's history*.[489]

Contrarily, I argue that al-Bayātī uses the al-Khayyām mask to explore the existential anxieties his speaker faces while attempting to come to terms with modernity. In al-Bayātī's case, this means not only dealing with the changes to premodern poetry that came in the wake of the modernist movement but also with the conflicting projects of Iraqi nationalism and Communism, which the poet found himself struggling to negotiate after his multiple exiles from

[488] Azouqa, "al-Bayyātī and W.B. Yeats," 269. Italics added.

[489] Azouqa, "al-Bayyātī and W.B. Yeats," 270. Italics added. If ʿĀʾishah is the Eurydice to Azouqa's Orpheus here, we are left to wonder if Orpheus will, this time, overcome his urge to look back as the couple attempts to leave Hades.

Iraq and sometime residency in Moscow. Although I am in agreement with Azouqa that al-Bayātī shows himself to be "the Arab myth-maker *par excellence*" with the publication of *He Who Comes and Does Not Come,*[490] his myths are better served by a reading that goes beyond the bounds of the national and into the transnational movements of ideas and political affiliations that he participated in.

The collection *He Who Comes and Does Not Come* gestures immediately to the transnational in its subtitle and epigraph, a paraphrased quote from 1937's *L'Envers et l'endroit* by Albert Camus. "Each artist thus keeps within himself a single source (*yanbūʿ*) which nourishes during his lifetime what he is and what he says. As for myself, I know that my source (*yanbūʿ*) is in the world of poverty and sunlight I lived in for so long."[491] Camus's comments on the inner motivations of the artist and "the world of poverty and sunlight" in which he lives explain the collection's subtitle, *An Autobiography of the Interior Life (al-Ḥayāh al-bāṭiniyyah) of ʿUmar al-Khayyām, Who Lived Throughout the Ages Awaiting* He Who Comes and Does Not Come.[492] Al-Bayātī thus quickly establishes his existential pedigree with the quote from Camus while at the same time he guides our reading of the al-Khayyām mask's function in the collection as one element of the "unique spring" that lies "deep down" inside the artist. In al-Bayātī's case, this spring is fed by both Eastern myth (in the form of the death-rebirth cycle his mask must deal with) and his interactions with the European philosophical tradition and Communism.

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[490] Azouqa, "al-Bayyātī and W.B. Yeats," 261.

[491] Al-Bayātī, *al-Aʿmāl al-shiʿriyyah*, Vol. 2, 59. Albert Camus, *L'Envers et l'endroit* (Paris: Gallimard, 1958), 13. The translation is Albert Camus, *Lyrical and Critical Essays*, Philip Thody ed., Ellen Conroy Kennedy trans. (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1968), 6.

[492] Al-Bayātī, *al-Aʿmāl al-shiʿriyyah*, Vol. 2, 57.

Throughout the collection, al-Khayyām, whom we as readers understand to be co-terminal with the speaker due to the subtitle (though he goes unnamed for several pages at the beginning of the collection), contends with "the world of poverty and light" in which he lives in the city of Nishapur.[493] Azouqa claims that "Al-Bayyātī's Nisapur in a number of his poems in *Al-Ladhī Yaʾtī* likewise represents the realm of the intellect, in addition to its function as the symbol of the realm of immortality and the ideals of the nation in the collection's title poem, 'Al-Ladhī Yaʾtī wa lā Yaʾtī.'"[494] Rather, the collection depends on a deep-seated ambivalence about al-Khayyām's hometown, which the speaker describes as "the Hell of Nishapur."[495] "All the invaders," he laments, "passed by Nishapur / in empty carts / and glanced at the children and the graves. / They sold copper rings, / rang the bells, / and all the invaders spit in her pockmarked face. / They bedded her when she was in labor pains."[496] The Nishapur of *He Who Comes* is the same Nishapur where al-Bayātī puts al-Khayyām on trial for blasphemy in *A Trial in Nishapur*.

To move beyond the setting of the poems and his use of al-Khayyām as a poetic persona, we also find him directly tying his poetic language to al-Khayyām's *Rubāʿiyyāt*. Of many examples, one in particular stands out as a direct quote (a translation of two words) from one of al-Khayyām's most famous poems. The Persian *rubāʿī* goes, "Alas! The book of youth has come to a close, / life's fresh spring has turned into December snows. / That bird of joy whose name was youth (*ān murgh-i ṭarab kih nām-i ū būd shabāb*) / Alas! I know not whence it came or

[493] Nishapur is where the astronomer and mathematician, that is, the historical al-Khayyām, is said to have hailed from. See de Blois, 299-300.

[494] Azouqa, "al-Bayyātī and W.B. Yeats," 263.

[495] Line 1 of "*al-Ṭufūlah"* ("Childhood"), al-Bayātī, *al-Aʿmāl al-shiʿriyyah*, Vol. 2, 63.

[496] Lines 1-7 of "*al-Layl fawqa Nīsābūr*" ("Night Over Nishapur"), al-Bayātī, *al-Aʿmāl al-shiʿriyyah*, Vol. 2, 65.

where it goes."[497] As we come to the end of al-Khayyām's story in *He Who Comes and Does Not Come*, we find these lines, "I call out for you, O Lord, from the bottom of the ladder / My skin is flaking off in the dark, / my hair has gone gray, the bird of youth (*ṭāʾiru 'sh-shabāb*) / slips into the fog".[498] Al-Bayātī here adopts an uncommon turn of phrase from al-Khayyām's poetry, "the bird of youth." His use of the poetic mask develops out of processes also involved with *taḍmīn*. However, he often goes even further by completely taking on the voices of his poetic interlocutors for the entirety of a poem or even a whole collection and addressing them to his contemporary experiences.

He Who Comes and Does Not Come ends with a set of nine new *rubāʿīs* that oscillate between hope for the future (summed up in the coming of a savior) and continued pessimism about the possibility for change. For example, the first goes, "The Messiah sold his blood to the Donkey King, / the revolutionaries were defeated, / the world was drowned in the mire, / and the clown masks fell into muds of shame (*fī wuḥūli 'l-ʿār*)." Is this an exclamation of hope for the future of the nation, an existential reflection on the absurdity of struggling against reality, or merely a continuation of the ambivalence that permeates *He Who Comes and Does Not Come*? (The name itself reflects the collection's overall ambivalence.) In the sixth, the speaker's existential angst bursts out in a complaint. "We must choose / to grab the wind and pass over the

[497] This is traditionally referred to as *Rubāʿī* 63. For the Persian text on which I have depended and another translation, see *The Rubāʿīyāt of ʿUmar Khayyām*, with an introduction by Parichehr Kasra trans., UNESCO Collection of Representative Works Persian Series, no. 21, Ehsan Yar-Shater ed. (Delmar, NY: Scholar's Facsimiles & Reprints, Inc., 1975), 63. Exemplifying the unstable redactions of al-Khayyām's *rubāʿiyyāt*, Hidāyat's version of this poem has a different third line that does not mention the bird of youth. *Tarānah-hā*, 79. I have consulted the translations included in *Rubaiyat of Omar Khayyam: English, French, German, Italian, and Danish Translations Comparatively Arranged in Accordance with the Text of Edward FitzGerald's Version with Further Selections, Notes, Biographies, Bibliographies, and Other Material*, Nathan Haskell Dole ed., Vol. I (Boston: L. C. Page and Company, 1898), 186. The poem is also available online at Ganjoor: http://ganjoor.net/khayyam/robaee/sh63/.

[498] Al-Bayātī, *al-Aʿmāl al-shiʿriyyah*, Vol. 2, 81.

voids, / to find the meaning behind the absurdity of life, / for life in this closed cycle (*al-madāri 'l-mughlaq*) is suicide." The eighth and ninth continue to play on the overall ambivalence of the collection. "We return, or we don't—who knows? /" asks the eighth, "to our mother the earth, who carries an embryo of the hope [we] seek inside her. / This sadness goes deeper, and the promises, / The moth of existence hovers around our fire." After a cavalier dismissal of the idea of rebirth, the eighth *rubāʿī* ends with the popular Sufi image of the moth and the flame. However, the moth here does not become one with the flame but "hovers" around it, thus suspending the traditional final immolation and mystical annihilation in the Divine. The eighth *rubāʿī* is ambivalent about the possible union with the Divine, and the ninth (and final) *rubāʿī* continues in the same manner, questioning one possible path to a better future by mentioning it only after the word *laʿalla* (perhaps, maybe). "The dead-alive (*al-mayyitu 'l-ḥayy*), with nothing to live on or place to go / blows into the ashes. / Perhaps (*laʿalla*) Nishapur / will, like a snake, shed the robe of her sadness and break the chains."

With this brief overview of the entire collection along with an idea of how al-Bayātī goes about adopting al-Khayyām's voice behind the poetic mask in mind, I offer a full translation of the collection's title poem, "He Who Comes and Does Not Come." The speaker's ambivalent outlook on the future defines the poem.

> ʿĀʾishah died, but I see her traversing the darkness,
> awaiting a knight coming from Syria.
> —You blind fly,
> Don't cover up the light
> from me, from ʿĀʾishah, you old crone.
> —This tavern waters its wine.
> But you've drunk for free
> worms crawled on your dejected, pallid forehead,
> and [your] eyes dried up.
> —Master, no one shall remain except The Everlasting One,
> and these stars.
> Everything is in vain, [like] grabbing onto the wind.

—ʿĀʾishah died, but I see her as I see you
Extending her hand, she said, I love you
and the angel smiled.
O Cloud, let it rain
whenever you wish, for tomorrow Nishapur will turn green
She will return to me from her abandoned grave
To wipe my cheek and water rock and bone.
—Will he come or not come? I see him coming towards me, and I don't
His hands point to me
from the shore of death that begins where life begins.
—Who was crying under this wall?
Dogs in a dream of an enchanted sorcerer
barking in the dark
or a dead man rooted
inside the earth awaiting Resurrection.
—Who was crying under this wall?
Perhaps it is the wind that heralds he who comes and does not come
perhaps a poet is born, or dies.[499]

In contrast to Azouqa's allegorical reading of the poem from earlier, what if we were to reconsider the function of al-Khayyām (who remains unnamed) as the poem's speaker? "He Who Comes and Does Not Come" could then be understood as a satirical commentary on the function of rebirth myths in modernist Arabic poetry. The poem's opening line, which the reader later understands is uttered by al-Khayyām in a tavern, takes on a whole new meaning: "ʿĀʾishah died, but I see her traversing the darkness / awaiting a knight coming from Syria."[500] Al-Khayyām's vision of the reborn goddess may only be a drunken illusion, for he complains to the

[499] Al-Bayātī, *al-Aʿmāl al-shiʿriyyah*, Vol. 2, 73-74. I have referenced Azouqa's translation at many points, but have departed from it in others. For some unexplained reason, she does not translate the entire poem, leaving out words and even entire lines without noting why despite the fact that she includes the entirety of the poem in Arabic following her translation. Azouqa, "al-Bayyātī and W.B. Yeats," 286-287. The poem is, admittedly, difficult to parse due to the use of a dash "—" to indicate spoken lines, all of which we might attribute to al-Khayyām, though other lines not offset by dashes vary between the speaker (al-Khayyām) and, perhaps, the tavern-keeper. I came across another translation in the final weeks before submitting the dissertation in Waed Athamneh's *Modern Arabic Poetry: Revolution and Conflict* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2017), 52-53. I unfortunately did not have the time to complete a detailed comparison of this translation with Azouqa's or my own.

[500] Al-Bayātī, *al-Aʿmāl al-shiʿriyyah*, Vol. 2, 73. I have modified Azouqa's translation, "al-Bayyātī and W.B. Yeats," 286.

tavern-keeper, "This tavern waters its wine" ("*maghshūshatun khamratu tilka 'l-ḥān*"). The tavern-keeper replies, "But you've drunk for free" ("*sakirta bi-l-majjān*").[501] Al-Khayyām's drunkenness now revealed, he begins a rant that moves through many of the vegetative mythic themes that populate Arabic modernist poetry. First, rain will fall on Nishapur once more. Then, al-Khayyām imagines ʿĀʾishah—al-Bayātī's goddess of rebirth—returning from her grave and her water washing over his face, the rocky land, and the bones. The scene calls up the awaited flood in Eliot's *The Waste Land*, and—as with Eliot's poem—a general tone of questioning irony about the possibility of a new life pervades "He Who Comes and Does Not Come." Consider the speaker's confusion in the line where we find the words used in the title of the collection: "*Yaʾtī wa-lā yaʾtī, arāhu muqbilan naḥwī, wa-lā arāh*" ("Will he come or not come? I see him coming towards me, and I don't").[502] Here we can see elements of an overall ambivalence about the possibilities rebirth might bring. In comparison with his earlier collections of straightforwardly-committed verse, the poet here moves much closer to the outright questioning of myth that would soon become central to Arabic poetry.[503] Instead of focusing on being doomed to endless repetition, al-Bayātī's al-Khayyām is left questioning the possibility of even one single instance of rebirth; forced to examine his worldly life in all its limitations, he is an existentialist.

Reading the poem in this way, one line in particular stands out as the crux of the speaker's existential crisis, which can be further explained if we apply Heidegger's conception of

[501] Azouqa ("al-Bayyātī and W.B. Yeats," 286) takes the verb to be *sakirtu* (I got drunk), which is a possible reading. Al-Bayātī, *al-Aʿmāl al-shiʿriyyah*, Vol. 2, 73 has it *sakirta* (You got drunk).

[502] Al-Bayātī, *al-Aʿmāl al-shiʿriyyah*, Vol. 2, 74; Azouqa, "al-Bayyātī and W.B. Yeats," 286. Translation modified.

[503] As the Arab modernist poets continued pushing the boundaries of their poetry, they began to compose metapoetry, treating poem and poet not only as the subject of poetry but also as its object. Snir associates this move with the "gradual retreat of Arabic poetry, at least in terms of the general public's interest in it, from the center of the [Arabic] literary system to its margins." *Rakʿatān fī al-ʿishq*, 82.

being-toward-death to it. Al-Bayātī depends on the existential tradition's recognition of death as that which shapes life, an old philosophical idea that came to play the primary organizing role in Heidegger's *Sein und Zeit*.[504] There, Heidegger outlines how a person can only live an authentic life by orienting their life in full knowledge of the certainty of death, a concept he calls "being-toward-death." In order to live an authentic life, a person must admit the inescapability of his or her *own* death and anticipate it. As Heidegger puts it, "this anticipation includes the possibility of taking the *whole* of Dasein in advance in an existentiell way, that is, the possibility of existing as a *whole potentiality-of-being*."[505] He then adds, "Being-toward-death is essentially anxiety,"[506] an idea that the French existential tradition—in which we can locate both Sartre and Camus, despite their protestations to the contrary—grows out of.[507] Al-Bayātī's existentialism, though founded in his readings of the French existentialists, hearkens back to Heidegger's notions of authentic life through the recognition of death's inevitability but with an added strain of political

[504] Al-Bayātī came to his understanding of death through the work of ʿAbd al-Raḥmān Badawī, whose own engagement with existentialism began during his studies with the Russian philosopher Alexandre Koyré. Koyré, in turn, had worked with Edmund Husserl—Martin Heidegger's advisor and mentor—and the esteemed French orientalist Henry Corbin, who translated Heidegger's *Sein und Zeit* into French for the first time and conducted extensive research on al-Suhrawardī's philosophy. Badawī's existential project emerged from, on the one hand, his prolonged engagement with European existentialism and, on the other, his ultimate goal to combine Sufism and existential philosophy. Di-Capua, "Arab Existentialism," 1068. Badawī's project finds its poetic analogue in al-Bayātī's work as each represents an attempt to bring together Sufism and twentieth century thought, though he added elements of political commitment we do not find in Badawī's work.

[505] Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 253. Italics in original. "Existentiell" is a term particular to Heidegger and has to do with the empirical existence of *Dasein* from an ontic rather than an ontological perspective. This distinction provided a starting point for Badawī, who brought Heidegger's thought to the Arab world. As Di-Capua tells us, "Badawi subscribed to two of the main themes of existentialism: first, *existence precedes essence* (i.e., who a human being is [his or her essence] is the result of his or her choices [existence]); and second, *time is of the essence* (i.e., human beings are time-bound, and the lived time that they experience is different from measured clock time)." Di-Capua, "Arab Existentialism," 1066-1067. Italics and brackets in original.

[506] Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 254.

[507] For more on the connection between Heidegger's and Camus's conceptions of anxiety, see Julian Young, "A Life Worth Living," *A Companion to Phenomenology and Existentialism*, Hubert L. Dreyfus and Mark A. Wrathall eds. (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2009), 526.

commitment that extends beyond the individual being or existence (*Dasein*, roughly) to concerns with others (an area where Heidegger's philosophy fails miserably).[508]

This existential anxiety appears most clearly in al-Bayātī's poem when al-Khayyām sees "he who comes and does not come," whose "hands point to me / from the shore of death that begins where life begins" ("*tushīru lī yadāh* / *min shāṭiʾi 'l-mawti 'lladhī yabdāʾu ḥaythu tabdaʾu 'l-ḥayāh*"). In these lines, the mysterious figure of He Who Comes and Does Not Come appears as a personification of death, which "begins" (*yabdaʾ*; death [*al-mawt*] is masculine and the verb begins with a *yāʾ* in Arabic, a language in which verbs inflect for gender) from the same shore where life "begins" (*tabdaʾ*; life [*al-ḥayāh*] being feminine, and the same verb starts with a *tāʾ* here). Death and life start at the same point. Life is thus oriented toward death.

The use of the word shore (*shāṭiʾ*) parallels al-Khayyām's explanation of death in *A Trial in Nishapur*, which also aligns with the concept of living an authentic life by "being-toward-death," accepting its inevitability, and organizing one's life in anticipation of it. A continuation of the Camusian existentialism al-Bayātī began exploring with the figure of Sisyphus in his 1954

[508] Di-Capua argues that Badawī's reception of the European existentialists offered him "a new philosophical frame of reference" through which they "fostered the rise of Arab phenomenology and taught Badawi that death is not simply an event that happens at the end of one's life, but rather an experience that shapes one's entire way of being and, especially, illuminates the condition of authenticity upon the eventual encounter with death itself." Di-Capua, "Arab Existentialism," 1066. Although al-Bayātī's notions of authenticity come from the same tradition, they do not exactly align with Badawī's. As Di-Capua further explains, "Badawi's existentialism was indeed apolitical, as it was a pledge to one's authentic way of being," in the vein of Heidegger's philosophy. Di-Capua, "Arab Existentialism," 1077. Al-Bayātī's introduction to existentialism occurred during the late 1940s and 1950s, and he therefore came to the new philosophical movement after it had been distilled through Ṭāhā Ḥusayn's comments on Sartre's *What is Literature?* in the journal *al-Kātib al-Miṣrī*. Existentialism had by that point moved away from philosophy and into commitment (*iltizām*) and committed literature in particular. Badawī's project represented a direct encounter with Heideggerian thought and "sought to update the medieval Sufi doctrine of the 'Perfect Man' (*al-Insān al-Kāmil*)." That is, "an 'isthmus (*barzakh*) between necessity (*wujūb*) and possibility (*imkān*), the mirror which combines the attributes of eternity and its laws with the attributes of the generation of being (*ḥidthān*).'" Di-Capua, "Arab Existentialism," 1068, quoting R. Arnaldez, "*al-Insān al-Kāmil*," *EI2*. http://dx.doi.org/10.1163/1573-3912_islam_COM_0375. Transliterations amended and words in ellipsis replaced. Al-Bayātī's existentialism came out of its reception in French thought, and "al-Bayati, who counted himself as an existentialist and a Camusian Third World poet, quoted [Che] Guevara's conviction that 'what we must create is the man of the twenty-first century.'" Di-Capua, "Arab Existentialism," 1081, quoting al-Bayātī, *Tajribatī al-shiʿriyyah*, 31.

poem "*Fī al-manfā*" ("In Exile"),[509] the play is a philosophical reflection on contemporary society and a call for revolt against "meaningless death."[510] Jalāl al-ʿAshīrī, whose critical essay on the play is included in its 1973 edition, goes so far as to title his piece "An Analytical Study of *A Trial in Nishapur*; or He Who Refuses Meaningless Life and Meaningless Death."[511] "Death is not so cruel," al-Khayyām tells the court he has been hauled before on the charge of blasphemy. "It is the other bank (*al-ḍiffah al-thāniyah*) of the river of life. […] Death is the other face of life (*al-mawt wajh al-ḥayāh al-ākhar*)."[512] Though we might be inclined to understand al-Khayyām's view of death in terms of Sufism, as Azouqa does, a transnational account of al-Bayātī's incorporation of European existentialism on the one hand and the Iranian conception of al-Khayyām as a rationalist obsessed with worldly life on the other offers a better explanation of the view of death in al-Bayātī's work from the 1960s.

As I have already mentioned, al-Bayātī's version of al-Khayyām has little basis in historical fact and developed out of the poet's encounter with the version of al-Khayyām that became popular during the early twentieth century in Europe and then the Near East. That he sometimes placed al-Khayyām among the Sufi poets[513] does not necessarily mean that he understood him solely as a Sufi. When a witness in *A Trial in Nishapur*, the University Professor, brings his claim of *kufr* (blasphemy) against al-Khayyām, he recites a *rubāʿiyyah* as

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[509] Al-Bayātī, *al-Aʿmāl al-shiʿriyyah*, Vol 1, 180-181.

[510] Al-Bayātī's version of al-Khayyām's story largely follows the version found in Harold Lamb, *Omar Khayyam: A Life* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, Doran & Company, Inc., 1934). See also Boullata, "The Masks of ʿAbd al-Wahhāb al-Bayātī," 107.

[511] Al-Bayātī, *Muḥākamah fī Nīsābūr*, 5.

[512] Al-Bayātī, *Muḥākamah fī Nīsābūr*, 38-39.

[513] For example, see *Yanābīʿ al-shams*, 27.

evidence of the crime: "*anta yā man naṣīḥu bi-ka / naltamisu 'l-ʿafw / qul lī, ayna tastaṭīʿu anta an tajida 'l-ʿafw"* ("O You for whom we call out / we seek pardon / Tell me, where can You find pardon?").[514] The Professor prefaces his quotation of the poem by telling the court,

> al-Khayyām has, every now and then, written *rubāʿiyyāt* collected in no single book but recited everywhere. The Sufis, in particular, know them and sinners repeat them, challenging the Qurʾān and the teachings of Islam. In my position as a humble servant of knowledge, I have collected many of these *rubāʿiyyāt*, written in different scripts across Persia but all composed by al-Khayyām."[515]

The Professor's testimony brings up a number of questions about the provenance of the *rubāʿiyyāt*, for they appear to already be a part of popular culture in the fictional world of the play. The Professor, not al-Khayyām, claims that the poet is involved with the Sufis. (Elsewhere, the play describes him as a man of science but not as a Sufi.) The Professor's admission that the verses he has collected are "written in different scripts" (*maktūbah bi-khuṭūṭ mukhtalifah*) across the entire Persian-speaking land does less to support his claim that they are "all composed by al-Khayyām" than it does to refute it.[516] In the end, once his accuser recites the lines, al-Khayyām "looks at the University Professor in astonishment and opens his mouth for the first time. 'I didn't write this *rubāʿiyyah*.'"[517] Al-Bayātī plays on al-Khayyām's mythical status throughout the play as he does in the collection *He Who Comes and Does Not Come*, using a mythos that

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[514] Al-Bayātī, *Muḥākamah*, 41. It is worth nothing that al-Bayātī's line breaks only result in three lines rather than the usual four and there does not seem to be any regular meter. This should not be surprising, as the Professor may have made up the verse himself in order to ascribe it to al-Khayyām and accuse him of *kufr*.

[515] Al-Bayātī, *Muḥākamah*, 40-41.

[516] The al-Khayyām in al-Bayātī's play here reminds us of the al-Khayyām mythos found in Persian literary history. "It is clear that by the 15th century at the latest the name of the famous philosopher and scientist had become a collective pseudonym for authors of *rubāʿīyāt*, especially those of hedonistic, fatalistic and more or less overtly anti-Islamic content […]." de Blois, 305.

[517] Al-Bayātī, *Muḥākamah*, 41-42.

formed over time in Iran, was 'discovered' again in Europe, and made its way back to the Near East following FitzGerald's translations.

While our understanding of al-Bayātī's *œuvre* and the reception of existentialism in Iraq would be well-served by a full translation of the play, such a lengthy endeavor is tangential to my current project. However, I would like to make a few more points regarding his presentation of al-Khayyām here. First of all, as the scene at court clarifies, *A Trial in Nishapur* portrays al-Khayyām as an outsider, a non-elite forced into conflict with a state-sponsored view of Islam enforced by the local elite of Nishapur. Beyond the University Professor, these also include the Chief Judge (*kabīr al-quḍāh*), the Head of the Religious Community (*rajul al-millah*), and even the theologian al-Ghazālī (d. 1111), who admonishes al-Khayyām as well, saying "I have heard how you have gone outside the teachings of Niẓām al-Mulk—may God rest his soul—and how you practiced magic in Isfahan the way unbelievers do."[518]

Later in the play, al-Khayyām leaves Nishapur in a caravan heading for Aleppo in the employ of a merchant. Along the way, the spirit of the founder of the Assassins (*al-Ḥashshāshīn*)—a group of Ismāʿīli rebels who opposed the Sunni Saljuqs[519]— al-Ḥasan al-Ṣabbāḥ (d. 1124), appears to al-Khayyām and asks him to join him in his sectarian rebellion. "I have granted you the opportunity to be born again," al-Ṣabbāh declares, "and here you are

[518] Al-Bayātī, *Muḥākamah*, 42. Al-Ghazālī is (in)famous for his *Incoherence of the Philosophers*, in which he argues against the influence of al-Farābī's and also Ibn Sīnā's thought in Islamic philosophy. He studied and taught in the newly-instituted *madrasah*s (schools) founded by the Saljuq grand-vizier Niẓām al-Mulk (d. 1092). For more on him, see Frank Griffel, "Al-Ghazali," *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Summer 2016 Edition), Edward N. Zalta ed., http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/sum2016/entries/al-ghazali/.

[519] For a detailed study of the group, see Marshall G.S. Hodgson, *The Order of Assassins: The Struggle of the Early Nizârî Ismâʿîlîs Against the Islamic World* (Philadelphia: The University of Pennsylvania Press, 2005). For a brief discussion of the political, religious, and historical context in Iran at the time, see *The Rubāʿīyāt of ʿUmar Khayyām* (1975), xi-xxxvii.

refusing it!"[520] Al-Khayyām declines to join the Assassins, despite their rebellion against the Sunni elites who forced al-Khayyām into exile from Nishapur, because his conception of revolution is total, unrelated to sectarian division and, more importantly, founded in the refusal of violence. He compares al-Ṣabbāḥ's feeding hashish to his men to steel them for their assassination missions to the Chief Judge's use of "something yet more dangerous: endless talk of Paradise and Hell" to pacify the people of Nishapur.

Al-Khayyām then explains his own stance on revolution. "We must wait. The revolutionary doesn't risk his own head or others' for nothing. Revolution requires preparation, mobilization, and biding one's time, waiting for the critical moment to strike. If I were to be born again, I would give myself over to it." Al-Ṣabbāḥ protests that if the circumstances are not right for revolt, one ought to draw first blood to spur on change, to which al-Khayyām replies, "The starlight of true revolution shines behind a thousand doors of long anticipation, but it will one day appear. People will mention how al-Khayyām died a soldier in a losing battle during the first fights for freedom [and] for the sake of humanity's victory in its final campaign." Immediately after saying this, al-Khayyām collapses from exhaustion, dead. His companions mention how he had been delusional, speaking to himself, before the merchant proclaims to them all, "God forgive us our sins! I didn't pay him his due. When I reach Aleppo, I'll give what he was owed to the poor."[521]

At the end of the play, we find a clear example of the existentialist ideas behind the philosophical framework for al-Bayātī's use of the al-Khayyām mask. Although he dies poor and broken, "a soldier in a losing battle," al-Khayyām gives in neither to the prescribed orthodoxy of

[520] Al-Bayātī, *Muḥākamah*, 75.

[521] Al-Bayātī, *Muḥākamah*, 80-81.

the elite class in Nishapur nor to the anarchic bloodshed al-Ṣabbāḥ invites him to join in. Instead, he keeps faith in his vision of a coming revolution, notwithstanding the fact that he knows he will not participate in it himself. On the road to Aleppo, he is like Sisyphus pushing his stone, and it is up to the audience to imagine him happy[522] in the knowledge that he never compromised on his beliefs as he dies in the dirt.

The Revolt Against Meaningless Death

While I do not think that we ought to consider the al-Khayyām of al-Bayātī's poetry primarily as a Sufi, another historical-mythical character, al-Ḥallāj, appears in many poems as a mystic martyr and symbol of revolution against state-sponsored violence. Most important when reading al-Ḥallāj's or other Sufis' roles in these poems is to note that al-Bayātī's Sufism, like his notions of revolution, is not monolithic but rather open to the participation of non-elites because it is non-hierarchical. For example, we might consider al-Ghazālī's Sufism—an almost orthodox Sufism as al-Bayātī understands it—as an instance of mysticism coopted by the state, something that was already happening during al-Ḥallāj's time centuries earlier. Al-Ḥallāj's Sufism—which led him to venerate Satan as the purest monotheist for refusing to bow down to Adam instead of God; to build his own Kaaba in Baghdad and perform the pilgrimage there; and to proclaim "I am the Truth"[523]—was far from the mystical practices of other contemporary Sufis. No matter

[522] In his famous rejection of nihilism, Camus wrote, "*La lutte elle-même vers les sommets suffit à remplir un cœur d'homme. Il faut imaginer Sisyphe heureux*." Albert Camus, *Le Mythe de Sisyphe : Essai sur l'absurde* (Paris: Gallimard, 1942), 166.

[523] Jawid Mojaddedi, "Ḥallāj," *EIr*, XI/6, 589-592; http://www.iranicaonline.org/articles/hallaj-1.

the reasons al-Ḥallāj had for stepping outside the accepted bounds of Sufism,[524] his actions took on a political meaning that only grew in influence after his execution. Al-Ḥallāj's individualist interpretation of Sufism set the stage for what Asef Bayat calls a non-movement, "the collective action of noncollective actors."[525] Bayat further explains that nonmovements "tend to be action-oriented, rather than ideologically driven […]. Second, whereas in social movements leaders usually mobilize the constituencies to put pressure on authorities to meet their demands, in nonmovements actors directly practice what they claim, despite government sanctions."[526] We can easily understand the modernists' incorporation of al-Ḥallāj's mystical project to advance their own social justice agendas in similar terms. Furthermore, because he continued his unorthodox praxis even in the face of death, he is a useful figure for a poet wishing to express his own refusal to submit to political authorities.[527] Al-Ḥallāj's function in al-Bayātī's poetry closely parallels that of al-Khayyām, who—at least in al-Bayāti's version of the story—was also martyred for his uncompromising stance against state tyranny. Both figures represent models of his driving philosophy: the revolt against meaningless death.

He puts on the al-Ḥallāj mask to speak out against state authoritarianism. As Snir explains in *Rakʿatān fī al-ʿishq*,

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[524] Snir explains, "al-Ḥallāj was considered […] by moderate Sufis to have deviated from Sufism when he revealed the secret [i.e., when he said, 'I am the Truth']." *Rakʿatān fī al-ʿishq*, 87.

[525] Bayat, "*Life as Politics*," 15.

[526] Bayat, "*Life as Politics*," 20.

[527] Of al-Bayātī's many rebellious actions that led to exile, his late-in-life protest against Saddam Hussein's government stands out. In 1995, the Iraqi government revoked the poet's citizenship after he attended a poetry festival in Saudi Arabia. Eric Pace, "Abdul Wahab al-Bayati, 73; Iraqi Poet and Innovator in His Art," *The New York Times*, 5 August 1999. http://www.nytimes.com/1999/08/05/arts/abdul-wahab-al-bayati-73-iraqi-poet-and-innovator-in-his-art.html?_r=0.

> the old sources discuss how al-Ḥallāj was a deviant among the Sufis of his age as far as his combining of the spiritual stages of development he reached with an interest in the issues of society: not only did he have a clear affinity for the miserable and untouchable and give money to the poor, he encouraged his followers to give up going on the pilgrimage, invite orphans to eat, and clothe [those same orphans] instead. Al-Ḥallāj also called for a just distribution of the tax burden, and his concern with the social situation put the [political] authority on guard about the danger of undermining the foundations of society and rule of law.[528]

The al-Ḥallāj mask allows him to fully engage with the revolutionary Sufism some scholars have located in his use of the al-Khayyām mask, which is less an expression of mystical affiliation than it is a medium for the existential exploration of being. Through al-Ḥallāj's ministry and martyrdom, al-Bayātī investigates the possibilities for individual revolt against orthodoxy, whether in politics, religion, or even mysticism.

As the Arab and Iranian modernists have understood it, al-Ḥallāj's Sufi contemporaries chafed at his unorthodox interest in issues of social justice just like the state did because it represented a disruption in a mystical path oriented only toward knowledge of the Divine. By connecting his mystical development with ongoing concerns about the mundane world, al-Ḥallāj made the mystical path political. Al-Bayātī's conception of the Sufi path follows from this mode of committed Sufism.

> My Sufism—if I can call it that—is a part of my poetic vision and the being that I burn with. It is my vision at this or that poetic stage (*marḥalah*). As I have mentioned many times, I am not seeking the Kingdom of God in another world. I seek the Kingdom of God and of Man in this world (*hādhihi al-dunyā*). For me, Sufism doesn't mean Sufi clothing, being a dervish, or going to dhikr circles but rather the renunciation of egotism, selfishness, jealousy, and all types of harm and evil, and unification with the spirit of this world and the music of the universe […].[529]

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[528] Sanīr, *Rakʿatān fī al-ʿishq*, 86.

[529] Al-Bayātī, *Yanābīʿ al-shams*, 166-167.

Al-Ḥallāj not only provides him with a model for a revolutionary Sufi but also offers an example of someone whose political engagement with society led him to take real action in the *dunyā*.

In "The Passion of al-Ḥallāj" (1964) al-Bayātī brings the mystic martyr into the poetics of myth he had begun to explore in *A Trial in Nishapur*. In a set of six poems roughly following the path of a Sufi seeker, he puts on the al-Ḥallāj mask to mirror the traditional narrative of al-Ḥallāj's ministry and subsequent execution. Again, he integrates the story of the historical/mythical figure in order to highlight the injustice of someone being killed for a belief, just as he does with his al-Khayyām mask. But whereas al-Khayyām retreats into existential reflection and away from action, al-Ḥallāj speaks out against to power in the fourth section, "*al-Muḥākamah*" ("The Trial"). "With two words, I let the Sultan know the secret / 'Coward!' I said to him."[530] The two unspoken words are here again "*anā al-ḥaqq*" ("I am the Truth"), but al-Bayātī adds a third in the second line: *jabān* (coward). Behind the mask, he speaks out against the application of state violence, though the Sultan, and the state more generally, remain nameless throughout the poem. The government that sentences al-Ḥallāj to death in this poem could be anywhere, so the revolutionary possibilities his execution opens up could happen anywhere at any time. The fourth section ends,

> In the wastes of the city, the poor,
> my brothers, raised a tumult
> crying, and terrified I awoke to the footsteps of time
> to find nothing but people bearing false witness and the Sultan
> circling around me, dancing: It is Satan's banquet
> among the wolves, here I am naked
> You killed me
> You abandoned me
> You forgot me
> You committed me to death a thousand years ago,
> and here I am sleeping,

[530] Al-Bayātī, *al-Aʿmāl al-shiʿriyyah*, Vol. 2, 15.

awaiting the dawn of my salvation, the hour of execution.[531]

He thus connects the historical event of al-Ḥallāj's execution with his revolutionary memory, which has lain asleep for a millennium but could be recalled at any time. The final two sections of the poem, "*al-Ṣalb*" ("The Crucifixion") and "*Ramād fī al-rīḥ*" ("Ashes in the Wind"), imagine the torture and eventual burning of al-Ḥallāj's body and revolve around the death and rebirth cycle, thereby linking the popular story of al-Ḥallāj's life and death with the broader modernist movement.

The Abbasid state intended its gruesome inscription of violence onto al-Ḥallāj's body to serve as both warning and threat by making him and his ideas taboo. Their plan backfired, and his revolutionary memory persisted among his many followers.[532] Arab modernist poets like al-Bayātī, ʿAbd al-Ṣabbūr, al-Sayyāb, Adūnīs, and others deftly employed bodies mutilated by the state in their poetry in attempts to bring new life to the revolutionary soul of figures such as Jesus, al-Ḥallāj, al-Suhrawardī, or other lesser and nameless but nevertheless unforgotten victims of state violence.

Al-Bayātī's own position on the power and value of death was fully formed by the time he published *Tajribatī al-shiʿriyyah* in 1968. When discussing the poetry he wrote during the late 1950s and 1960s, he relates death (*al-mawt*) to freedom (*al-ḥurriyyah*) in a way reminiscent of al-Ḥallāj's willingness to die for what he believed in.

> In *Glory for Children and Olives*, *Poems in Exile*, *Twenty Odes from Berlin*, and *Words Don't Die*, death was for the sake of freedom. That is, death became the price for freedom and freedom the price for death. Meaningless death (*al-mawt bi-l-majjān*) never has any value (*qīmah*) since it strips the condemned man of all

[531] Al-Bayātī, *al-Aʿmāl al-shiʿriyyah*, Vol. 2, 15-16.

[532] The spectacle of al-Ḥallāj's execution only intensified his fame and reminds us of Foucault's analysis of the unintended consequences of corporal punishment that breaks body but not soul. Michel Foucault, *Discipline & Punish: The Birth of the Prison* (New York: Vintage Books, 1995).

> value such that the life he leaves behind has no meaning at all. However, dying for the sake of freedom, the noble martyrdom that is the death of those who fight back (*al-munāḍilīn*), is never separate from human death because those fighting back are not transformed into saints or miracle workers. They are instead pure, simple, good people […]. Their deaths are capable of opening people's eyes, for they themselves choose it; it is a duty, not fate or a gift they present to others. Still, in the eyes of others, they transform into heroes since their deaths exemplify the path to freedom, and they become a mythical symbol of sacrifice (*ramzan usṭūriyyan li-l-fidāʾ*). They represent all the virtues of society, embody all of its hopes, and become exemplary heroes. This depiction of death shows up in *Fire and Words*, *The Book of Poverty and Revolution*, and *He Who Comes and Does Not Come* by way of introspection, journeying into the depths of those heroes' and martyrs' souls, and conjuring forth their exemplary characters.[533]

His revolution against meaningless death encapsulates the existentialist side of his project, which he combines with a heroic and radical Sufi opposition to orthodoxy.

The revolt against meaningless death first appears as a theme in his work in 1962, six years before he outlined in retrospect the development of his conception of death in *Tajribatī al-shiʿriyyah*. The first instance I am aware of occurs in the 1962 poem "*al-Ghurāb*" ("The Crow"), which shares its name with one of Nīmā's poems—though Nīmā's *ghurāb* is a raven, not a crow. The poem is in one of al-Bayātī's most explicitly committed collections, *Fire and Words*, and it ends with a succinct and simple distillation of the motivations behind his philosophy of commitment: "*anā lā akhāfu 'l-mawta / lākinnī akhāfu 'l-mawta bi-l-majjān / b-ismi ghurābihim hādhā 'l-laʿīn*" ("I do not fear death / but I do fear meaningless death / in the name of this damned crow of theirs").[534] Whereas Nīmā's *ghurāb* (raven) symbolizes the darkness of sorrow in a lost world, al-Bayātī's *ghurāb* here is quite like the crow God sent to Cain (Qābīl) to show him how to bury the body of his brother Abel (Hābīl) after he killed him (see Qurʾān 5:26-31).

[533] Al-Bayātī, *Tajribatī al-shiʿriyyah*, 21-22. Partially quoted also in Sanīr, *Rakʿatān fī al-ʿishq*, 48.

[534] Al-Bayātī, *al-Aʿmāl al-shiʿriyyah*, Vol. 1, 421.

The presence of the crow in the final line of his poem reminds us of the scene of fratricide in the Qurʾān, thus underscoring the uselessness of a meaningless death.

This combination of existential themes with political commitment was, according to Di-Capua, a philosophical and literary approach particular to Iraqi intellectuals, and its popularity continued to grow during the political upheavals in Iraq during the 1960s. Al-Bayātī's fight against meaningless death comes directly from of his understanding of existentialism, which was in line with the broader Arab view of the movement. In fact, prior to the disaster of 1967, "existentialist themes such as alienation, anticipation of death, absurdity, angst, estrangement, and revolt became dominant in much of the poetry, prose, and theater of the era."[535] However, to return briefly to al-Bayātī's portrayal of al-Khayyām once again, the poet made a conscious attempt to reach beyond uniquely Arab models for existentialism, most obviously in his 1962 play *A Trial in Nishapur*.

Al-Bayātī extensively comments on the connections between Sisyphus, al-Khayyām, social critique, and his understanding of existentialism in *Yanābīʿ al-shams*.

> When Sisyphus appears in *A Trial in Nishapur*, which was published in 1963, he is still rolling his stone in the valley. Al-Khayyām contemplates him, seeing his terrible condition […].
>
> The play depicts pains, hopes, and deeds: the pains of a sick, decaying society—its people transformed into 'repetitive copies of a yellowed book', its people *dying for nothing* (*mujtamaʿ yamūt al-insān fīh bi-l-majjān*); hopes for a society the star of true revolution rises over; and the deeds al-Khayyām was punished for committing, whether they were crimes like his invention of the solar calendar (applied science), his discovery that the earth is not the center of the universe and that the stars are static (theoretical science), and writing the *Rubāʿiyyāt* (art) or his other accomplishments […].
>
> From this, my cultural and spiritual experience led me to the heroes of myths and history, the living among them and the dead, at different crossroads of the world. I accepted them all: the Sufi, the lover, the warrior, the revolutionary, and the thinker. I accepted them existentially (*bi-shakl wujūdī*), searching for the pith (*lubāb*) of living culture in their experience. Perhaps the reason for all of this

[535] Di-Capua, "Arab Existentialism," 1084.

> is that I myself live my poetry and my culture existentially (*aʿīsh … maʿīshah wujūdiyyah*), with neither conditions nor premises (*dūna shurūṭ wa-lā muqaddimāt*).[536]

His self-conception of the poet in his later poetry thus reflects the existential dilemmas introduced in his early work, with death providing the ultimate organizing principle for life.

Conclusion: Al-Bayātī's Transnational Commitment

Once al-Bayātī fully adopted an existentialist position through the use of the poetic mask, his poetry matured. It became less outwardly committed—as his early collections had been—but lost none of its revolutionary bent. In fact, readers who plumb the depths of meaning in poems like "He Who Comes and Does Not Come" and "The Passion of al-Ḥallāj," find themselves in the midst of what Adorno calls "autonomous art": art that may not be openly committed but still avoids becoming a fetish. "For the committed," Adorno explains, "such works are a distraction from the battle of real interests, in which no one is any longer exempt from the conflict between the two great blocs."[537] Al-Bayātī, like al-Sayyāb, was caught up in the Cold War conflict, even after he became more ambivalent about direct Communist commitment. However, the mystery surrounding his poems' existential masks, such as al-Khayyām and al-Ḥallāj, keeps his poetry from devolving into straightforward commitment. At the same time, the underlying revolutionary lessons of their lives and deaths preclude them from becoming mere poetic fetishes. It is precisely because his poems avoid overt nationalism that they do not "assimilate themselves to

[536] Al-Bayātī, *Yanābīʿ al-shams*, 10. Second set of italics added.

[537] Adorno, "Commitment," 177.

the brute existence against which they protest," though because they address themselves to an external reality all the same, they do not fall to the level of the fetish.[538]

After the early 1960s, his poetic influences became increasingly transnational as his poetic vistas widened to include not only figures from the Arab past but also the gods of ancient Mesopotamia, Western writers, and Persian poets and philosophers. Of all of these, his sustained engagement with Iran stands out as the most important because of the overall number of poems and entire collections he devoted to Persians such as al-Khayyām, al-Ḥallāj, al-Suhrawardī, Rūmī, and ʿAṭṭār.

His last collection, *Nuṣūṣ sharqiyyah* (*Eastern Texts*), published the year he died, offers a final example of how the poet's transnational commitment worked with regard to the poetic inspiration he drew from the Persian tradition. Among other poems dedicated to al-Maʿarrī, Damascus, and Baghdad, the collection includes the long poem "A Lament to Ḥāfiẓ al-Shīrāzī" as well as the title poem. In it, the old poet's memories of the past bubble up in fifty short vignettes he completed at the end of November, 1998. Among these, he remembers witnessing the 1953 coup in Iran and its aftermath while living in Egypt. "The day the mob killed Fāṭimī in Tehran[539] / I was playing chess with Sayyid Makkāwī," he recalls.[540] Elsewhere he remembers, "The Shah, / following the coup against Mosaddegh, / returned to Tehran with an Iraqi air escort / and the agents of imperialism. / As for me, / I went home / after giving / the barman my last dime."[541] He intersperses imagined scenes among these seemingly genuine memories to create a

[538] Adorno, "Commitment," 177-178.

[539] Ḥusayn Fāṭimī, Mosaddegh's Minister of Foreign Affairs, was executed by firing squad on 10 November 1954.

[540] ʿAbd al-Wahhāb al-Bayātī, *Nuṣūṣ sharqiyyah* (Dimashq: al-Madā, 1999), 63. Makāwī (d. 1997) was a famous Egyptian radio personality, composer, and singer.

[541] Al-Bayātī, *Nuṣūṣ sharqiyyah*, 64.

map of his poetic development and inspiration, which transcended his own tradition and depended on his interaction with Persian cultural heritage and history in particular.

Al-Khayyām appears in these poems as well, where he "apologized for meeting me / at the Observatory, / in fear of the informers, / for he had been indicted for his religion, / and I / for kidnapping the Sultan's daughter, / being crazy for wine, / and dancing naked under the starlight."[542] In a later scene, the poet spends two nights at the Observatory, after which a servant girl gives him "three roses / and a piece of silver / The price of my trip / to Khurāsān."[543] Overall, the collection shows his continual attention to Iran throughout his life and acknowledges the debt he owes to al-Khayyām, who helped him in his journey through the East.

Throughout his career, al-Bayātī infused his poetry with themes and figures from the Iranian tradition, transnationally linking his modernist poetic content with the Persian literary past. Although there is no evidence that he was aware of the parallels between his poetry and that of the Iranian modernists like Nīmā, Shāmlū, Farrukhzād, and others, his poetic sensibilities led him to draw on the same mixture of European and premodern Arabic and Persian poetic influences that theirs—and the other Arab modernists'—emerged from. Like Nīmā and al-Sayyāb, he was at the forefront of the formal development of the poetic line and meter, which is apparent in his application of the poetic device of *taḍmīn*. His employment of this device allowed him to both bring the premodern Arabic poetic tradition into his verse through direct quotes and also to add his own modern world-view by redeploying classical motifs, interrogating them, and offering a response informed by his view of justice and the place of the poet in the modern world. Putting on masks of premodern heroes, saints, and mythical figures, he engaged them in a

[542] Al-Bayātī, *Nuṣūṣ sharqiyyah*, 76.

[543] Al-Bayātī, *Nuṣūṣ sharqiyyah*, 88.

contemporary struggle based on rejecting meaningless death. Although he often questioned the utility of the death-rebirth motifs upon which modernist poetry is founded, he continually fought the inherent pessimism of eternal rebirths and the endless circle of repetition. His poetics of myth and transnational commitment represent an attempt to move beyond the tradition that preceded him by paying attention to the shared cultural past of Mesopotamian societies, which transcends artificial national borders. His poetry therefore presents a prime example of how transnational poetics work in Iraqi and Iranian modernist poetry.

Conclusion

Transnational Poetics and the Rise of Modern Arabic and Persian Poetry in Iraq and Iran

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> Myth is already enlightenment, and enlightenment reverts to mythology.
>
> - Horkheimer and Adorno, *Dialectic of Enlightenment* (1944)[544]

The poems I read in the preceding chapters show us that the roots of modernism lie not in Europe but in the Near East, the original source of the myths lying at the very heart of the planetary modernist movement. While we cannot deny the impact European modernist poetry had on the Iraqi and Iranian modernist poets, reading their poetry solely as a result of colonial intervention gives us only part of the story. Instead, I argue that we must endeavor to account for the dialectical relationship that exists between eastern and western modernism and to understand their transnational dynamics of poetic exchange. To do so, I use a transnational paradigm of analysis that seeks to discover how two "minor" modernist traditions (here, the Iraqi and Iranian) interact with each other, often subverting the modernist "centers" of Europe. As we have seen, despite the obvious changes these eastern poets' engagements with European poetry brought to their respective traditions, their continued incorporation into their poems of premodern Arabic poetic form and the vast reserve of Near Eastern myth brings Iraqi and Iranian modernist poetry together as a transnational response to European interventions. That the broader Arabic and Persian modernist traditions developed in concert with one another, as well as out of their interactions with European modernist poetry, leads us to wonder: where did modernism really begin? The Arabic and Persian traditions are neither wholly the results of European influence, nor is European modernism a *sui generis* product of European literary development. The poems

[544] "Preface," *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, xviii.

studied in this dissertation thus help us to tell a more complete story of the planetary movement of modernism. Following Horkheimer and Adorno's provocative assertion about myth and enlightenment's dialectical relationship in which one is never without the other—and otherwise neither could exist—I conclude this dissertation by proposing that the East is already modernist, and modernism reverts to the East.

The chapters included here thus take the first steps on a new path for studies of Near Eastern literary modernism. In them, I read Iraqi and Iranian modernist poetry transnationally and comparatively. And rather than understanding these minor modernist traditions solely to be the products of European colonial projects and literary influence, I look to the myriad connections between them, links in form and content that lay beyond their interactions with European modernist poetry. While I do not ignore Western poetry's indelible mark on the development of the modernist Iraqi and Iranian traditions (and their mark on it still waits to be brought to light), I consider the parallel innovations on the premodern Arabic prosody that lies at their cores along with their shared incorporations of ancient Near Eastern myths of death and rebirth. Through such consideration, I further argue that these prosodic links and corresponding dependence on mythic foundations transnationally bring the Iraqi and Iranian modernist poetic traditions together to respond to the Western colonial and neocolonial drive to globalize and homogenize, to complicate the Enlightenment project to separate and categorize. By situating the Iraqi and Iranian (and by extension the Arabic and Persian) modernist traditions as dynamic nodes in a literary polysystem, I argue for a fundamentally different approach to Near Eastern literatures, one which takes up not only their relationships to their contexts of composition but also—and perhaps more importantly—their internal, reflexive aesthetic features.

The readings of Iraqi and Iranian modernist poetry I offer above center around prolonged analyses of how my subjects employ changes in poetic form to frame their modernist visions. By starting from the building blocks of the poetic foot, rhyme, and meter, I provide a foundational framework for the arguments I make throughout the dissertation. I begin with Nīmā Yūshīj's invention of new poetic forms that took the foot rather than the entire line as their structural base to reorient our conception of modernist poetry in Iran. Instead of allowing the external Iranian political situation to guide our readings of Nīmā's work and the poetry that followed it, I employ a critique that begins with the formal structure of the poem and moves outward.

In addition to the formal features of modernist poetry, I also look to its intricate connection with the Near Eastern poetic past. In Nīmā's "The Phoenix," intertextuality took us back to figures as central to the Persian mystical past as Farīd al-Dīn ʿAṭṭār and Mansūr al-Ḥallāj. These mystics supply the thematic material Nīmā uses to create his "imagined edifice" for modernist poetry in Iran. By changing the way poetic feet can be combined, Nīmā at once distinguishes his poems from those of his predecessors and admits his debt to the Persian poetic past. We can therefore better understand poetic modernism in Iran to be a continuation of poetic tradition than a total break from it.

The same holds in the Iraqi case. In my reading of Badr Shākir al-Sayyāb's long poem "Weapons and Children," I address his novel use of the same modernist poetic techniques Nīmā introduced in Iran, such as varying the number of poetic feet in a single line of poetry. Al-Sayyāb's poem also reaches back into the reserves of Near Eastern myth like Nīmā's does, depending on the cycle of death and rebirth as a constitutional part of its poetics. Starting from these shared features of form and content, I move on to analyze al-Sayyāb's poetry in relation to his political shift from anti-imperial Communist to Iraqi nationalist. I also note how his poetry (if

not he himself) harbors an internal tension engendered by Soviet transnationalism-from-above and nascent feelings of Iraqi nationalism, which were thrown into direct conflict following his experience of the 1953 coup against Mosaddegh in Iran.

Extending the transnational links I locate in Nīmā's and al-Sayyāb's poetic projects, I then consider the contrasting functions of death in the poetry of Aḥmad Shāmlū and Furūgh Farrukhzād. Shāmlū openly admits to his political ideology in his second collection, *Manifesto*, through his conception of death as a necessary step on the path of revolution. Farrukhzād's ambivalence about death and about the central modernist trope of continual rebirth helps her to create a subtle modernist masterpiece with her final poem, "Let Us Believe in the Beginning of the Cold Season," in which she further develops the Persian poetic tradition by extending Nīmā's metrical innovations. Both poets continue to push Persian poetry in the transnational directions Nīmā began to map out with his poetic and critical project. Shāmlū ensconces himself within the international imaginary of Communism through his incorporation of the scene of Federico García Lorca's death; Farrukhzād fully engages with and answers back to T.S. Eliot and Charles Baudelaire in her poetry.

In the final chapter, I show how ʿAbd al-Wahhāb al-Bayātī similarly imbued his poetry with other voices by using *taḍmīn* quoting and putting on masks, both those of earlier Arab poets such as Abu al-ʿAlāʾ al-Maʿarrī and al-Mutanabbī as well as Persians, including but not limited to ʿUmar al-Khayyām, al-Ḥallāj, and ʿAṭṭār. I argue that his thoroughgoing approach to not only the Arab but also the Persian poetic past lays bare the transnational makeup of Iraqi modernism after al-Sayyāb. Moreover, I illustrate how his refusal of what he calls "death for nothing" emerges out of the burgeoning existentialist philosophical movement that swept through the Iraqi intellectual community during the 1950s. He combines existentialism with the Islamic mystical

tradition in his poetics of transnational commitment, a poetics that weaves together all the various threads of intertextuality and influence that I trace throughout the dissertation.

To conclude, this dissertation demonstrates not only the possibilities transnational analysis opens up for the study of Arabic and Persian poetry but also reveals many of the constituent elements of these poetries that lay beyond our reach without such analysis. Notwithstanding the newfound interest within the academy in innovative approaches to minor literatures under the rubric of world literature, there remains an all-too-apparent lack of attention to Near Eastern literary traditions and how they fit into the planetary modernist movement. I offer this project as a starting point for further studies of the undeniable but as yet mostly unstudied connections of the Arabic and Persian modernist movements, an invitation to reorient our attention to the edges of modernism. Only once we have mapped how far modernism has gone can we venture to find its true beginnings.

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