ENGAGING TRADITION IN MODERN ARAB POETICS

Abstract

The modernist movement in Arabic literature develops its own poetics, especially pertaining to poetry, in dialogue with both the Arab literary legacy and modernity in its Western manifestations. In the face of many challenges after the Second World War, poets felt the need for a poetics of regeneration, a mythical method that could superimpose a totalizing vision on a seemingly dying land and civilization. T. S. Eliot's writings on tradition and his use of myth drew attention to pre-Islamic mythology, especially in its Babylonian and Phoenician manifestations. Tradition was manipulated, as well, in search of its dynamic impulse for innovation and change. Both al-Maʿarrī and al-Mutanabbī were re-discovered beyond their other attributes. Both foreshadow the modernist impulse for change, dissent, thought, reason and morality. Both make high claims for poetry. Although modern poets developed different commemorative strategies, recollection undergoes re-tailoring in view of each poet's commitment at a certain time. This essay discusses these strategies under four headings: Dialogization, Dedications, Exilic Space, Textual Apprenticeship.

Although seeming to perpetuate an epistemological break with the ancients, modern Arabic poetry since the mid-1940s has manifested an intricate and deep engagement with tradition. Writers, critics, and poets alike wrote on this issue, not only to pre-empt counter-criticism against their apparent deviation from tradition at large, but also to subscribe positively to a dynamic engagement with tradition. The view of a dynamic tradition has gained steadily, perhaps since the publication of T. S. Eliot's views on tradition, along with other insights into the Arabic literary corpus. It may be of great significance that T. S. Eliot's "Tradition and the Individual Talent" appeared in a number of translations by scholars from different positions, including Rashād Rushdī (1951), Munaḥ Khūrī (January 1955), Muḥammad Musṭafā Badawī (May 1956, June 1956), and Laṭīfah al-Zayyāt (1964).[1] His other

[1] See Rashād Rushdī, *Mukhtārāt min al-Naqd al-Adabī al-Muʿāṣir* (Cairo: Anglo-Egyptian Bookshop, 1951). Also Munaḥ Khūrī's translation of Eliot's article, "Naẓrah fī al-Naqd al-Adabī" (A View of Literary Criticism), *Al-Adīb* (March 1955), pp. 20-21, and his translation of "Tradition and the Individual Talent," in *Al-Adīb* 27, no. 1 (Jan. 1955), pp. 32-36. Badawī's translation of the same article appeared in *Al-Ādāb* (Cairo, May-June 1956), n.p. Laṭīfah al-Zayyāt's translation is included in her book, *Maqālāt fī al-Naqd al-Adabī* (Cairo: Anglo-Egyptian Bookshop, 1964). See also ʿIzz al-Dīn Ismāʿīl, "Al-Shiʿr al-Muʿāṣir wa al-Turāth" (Contemporary Poetry and Literary Tradition), *Al-Ādāb* 3 (1966), pp. 22-25. On translations, see Māhir Shafīq Farīd, "Athar T. S. Eliot fī al-Adab al-ʿArabī al-Ḥadīth," *Fuṣūl* 4 (June, 1981), pp. 173-192; Muḥammad Shaheen, "Eliot in Modern Arabic Poetry," in *T. S. Eliot:*

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essay, "The Function of Criticism," was no less attractive at a time when young intellectuals were involved in writing on, and researching, the role of literature in the formation of political and cultural consciousness.[2] As I shall explain shortly, these writings in prose, along with translations and adaptations or appropriations, were meant to serve as a poetics of challenge and innovation, which poets staunchly claimed as their task to forward and explain. Journals of repute were to be the platforms for that dissemination of knowledge, and poets engaged throughout the 1950s and the 1960s in a fight of great social, cultural, and political ramifications. Poets found themselves fully involved in the politics of the period in the aftermath of the partition of Palestine, the Cold War, the increasing interest in the natural resources and strategic situation of the area, the emergence of new powers in the Middle East, the divisions between nationalist and Marxist ideologies, and the Zionist strategy to collaborate with corrupt systems in the region to evacuate local Jewish populations. Poets were on the lookout for a vision, a worldview, to bring life to an otherwise dying land. The vision itself invites and invokes a new poetics, in tandem with or in separation from classical poetics, with special emphasis on theories of persona, mask, and dramatic monologue, along with images, symbols, fertility myths and historical constructs. There was no separation then between this epistemological stance and their engagement in the struggle against exploitation inside and the fight against the threat from outside. Intellectuals felt the need for an avant-garde to lead the mass population.

Poetics and Politics

It is my argument that the act of recollecting classical poets falls within this epistemological trajectory so as to uncover and expose the effete and the corrupt while consolidating the dynamics of growth through stratagems of deviation, difference, and transgression at large. The effort was not homogeneous, nor was it smooth, for the poets had their own visions, backgrounds, readings and affiliations. Each poet's career underwent transformation to cope with the rhythm of time and the encroaching pressures. The casual method of deploying speech-like language or allusion in the early 1950s gave way in the early 1960s to the use of personae and masks, then evolved into more intricate engagements in textual paradigms of affiliation

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Man and Poet, vol. 1, ed. Laura Cowan (Orono, Maine: National Poetry Foundation, 1990), pp. 151-164, and Terri DeYoung, "T. S. Eliot and Modern Arabic Poetry," *Yearbook of Comparative and General Literature* 48 (2000), pp. 3-21.

[2] Eliot's "The Function of Criticism" appeared in a number of translations, too, in 1951, 1957, 1964, and 1978. See Farīd, "Athar T. S. Eliot," p. 180. In context, see DeYoung, "T. S. Eliot," pp. 5-6.

or opposition, which gave way in turn to further experimentation with forms and stratagems from which emanated poems of great textual resonance. Analysis in the present paper dwells on recollection in its intertextual manifestation as an act of alliance and difference. While the use of "engagement" since the late 1940s smacks of the political discourse of the post-war period, its use here also refers to and signifies textual appropriation and referentiality. Hence there was the need for poets to fluctuate between more than one register, be it existentialist, Marxist, or nationalist.

The political and the ideological assumes significance only within a literary endeavor whereby writers and poets first demonstrate their identity in a poetic register of some configurational nature which may fall short of offering a specific agenda. More often than not, this agenda is carefully kept in the background, so as not to incite accusations of poetic failure. My argument follows these engagements and issues in order to trace the implications of poetic recollection within the delicate intersectional dialectic between tradition and modernity. This paper proposes to concentrate on Arab poets' recollections of, and engagements with, their forebears, especially Abū al-Ṭayyib al-Mutanabbī (915-965 C.E.) and Abū al-ʿAlāʾ al-Maʿarrī (973-1057), within the context of the challenge of the modern and the symbiosis of tradition and modernity.

As I intend to propose, intertextual engagement is a show of allegiance as much as it is an act of aggression against the recollected, be it a poem or a figure constructed in historical narratives, within an understanding which may well incorporate Ezra Pound's definition of tradition as the "beauty which we preserve and not a set of fetters to bind us."[3] In theory, discussions and recollections make up a discursive struggle with an agenda and a commitment to undermine and challenge other competing discourses. Especially in moments of crisis, like the late 1940s, Arab intellectuals felt entitled and called upon to participate in change. Whether using confrontational or smooth literary discourses, there is in the discursive effort an urgency prompted by a sense of responsibility towards social justice, national issues, and the human condition at large. Partaking of the *Nahḍah* discourse with its public intellectualism, poetics since the late 1940s has forged for itself a number of registers and strategies whose common ground is dissent. But dissent is not merely a wayward personal discontent, despite the existence of this, for the political and the social, as well as the literary and the cultural, take issue with what has been burgeoning since the *Nahḍah* without a final settlement. Issues of modernity and tradition, renovation and

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[3] Ezra Pound "The Tradition," an article published in Dec. 1913, see *Literary Essays of Ezra Pound*, ed. and intro. T. S. Eliot (New York: A New Directions Book, 1918, rpt. 1968), p. 91.

authenticity, westernization and atavism were as real and urgent as they are today, for the drive is towards an understanding of the self, its place in the modern world, against a narrative of the past which has been undergoing some deconstruction, but not a dissecting analysis. Although the 1950s were receptive to these efforts, the hegemonic patriarchal, neo-patriarchal and dominating bourgeois discourses in different areas of the Arab world have been staging a strong fight against innovation and open questioning of heritage. But discourses of opposition multiply, taking a number of tracks, which may be defined, in Michel Pécheux's terms,[4] as follows:

1. Ideologically interpellated intellectuals may identify fully with the ideology they subscribe to, as did the early Badr Shākir al-Sayyāb (1926-64) in his communist affiliation and ʿAbd al-Wahhāb al-Bayātī (1926-1999) of the 1950s. Poetry in this ideologically interpellated stance tends to be anti-colonial, anti-patriarchal and committed to class and national struggle. Poetics collapses the lyrical and the polemical, while striving to objectify its utterance, so as to reach for its goal and target. Its dramatizations and attempts to distance the poet from the poem and allow a plethora of voices may find in al-Bayātī's "The Village Market" a good example.[5] The deviational nature of this poetics manifests itself in speech-like language, daily usage and popular sentiments with no effort to court the classical language of the *qaṣīdah*.

2. This same outlook may give way to counter-identification, too, for, to use Issa Boullata's re-phrasing of Pécheux, it "rejects the identity inscribed in the ruling ideological practices, thus remaining more or less subordinate to what it opposes."[6] In responding to tradition or engaging modernization, poetry here borrows from both. Contamination is the imprint, which even paratextual devices such as dedications cannot dislodge. Almost every modern poet betrays this double indebtedness. Even when al-Bayātī addresses, for example, a poem to the "reactionary poet T. S. Eliot," he cannot release his subtext from the presence of his forebear's ghost. T. S. Eliot's influence for that generation "was eruptive and insistent," writes Jabra I. Jabra, especially as "the people who read him most and translated him and commented on his work were themselves the leading young writers and poets of the new generation."[7] He further adds that Eliot was to him and to his generation "an

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[4] Michel Pécheux, *Language, Semantics, and Ideology* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1982).

[5] See the poem in *An Anthology of Modern Arabic Poetry*, selected, edited and translated by Mounah A. Khouri and Hamid Algar (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1975), pp. 115-116.

[6] Issa J. Boullata, *Trends and Issues in Contemporary Arab Thought* (New York: State University of New York Press, 1990), p. 141.

[7] Jabra I. Jabra, "Modern Arabic Literature and the West," pp. 7-22, in *Critical Perspectives on Modern Arabic Literature*, ed. Issa J. Boullata (Washington: Three Continents, 1980), p. 12, n. 7.

articulate and concise advocate of new incipient thoughts."[8] With this impact, poets in their early maturation cannot resist the attachment, especially as Eliot's discontent and criticism of a dying civilization, along with his readings of tradition, offer them a much-needed preparation.

3. "Disidentification'' comes in consequence to increasing consciousness against hegemonic discourse, not only in its neo-patriarchal assimilation of colonialist legacy and its resilient practices to sustain power, but also in its manipulation of culture, religion, and history to increase its power and tighten hegemony. Against this manipulation of history and tradition, transformative and deviational poetics resorts to Sufi, ascetic, rational, and popular narrative and symbols. It brings to the foreground historical figures who stood against oppression and fought for social and political justice. It is in this epistemological domain that modernist poetics forges its imprint, for the Eliotesque allegiance to "something outside ourselves,"[9] and the use of objective correlatives from history, mythology, and tradition drove many to develop another line of engagement with indigenous faiths, mythologies, symbols and historical figures.

Translation as a Modernist Engagement

While revealing a changing consciousness and a commitment to a dynamic role of the literati, translation is a deliberate critique of the present. It is also an assault with a goal to undermine beliefs and platitudes. It is certainly a deployment of other techniques and views to create new spaces. In the long run, it enforces ways and attitudes, and brings alien voices into new configurations. It ultimately enhances intertextual density and negotiates its registers against others from the classical, the local and the mythical. In this respect, dealings by Arab poets with the seemingly dichotomous or binary do not appear here as personal pronouncements, despite the fact that poets develop such a discourse at times in interviews and short comments. In the latter, they may even negotiate issues as Arab intellectuals were to do later in a number of conferences.[10] But representative poetry shows wider scopes and manifests rich engagements. The poem, in its modernist manifestations, offers its case in dialogue with Arab classical poetics and modern western readings. In so far as the classical side is concerned, it is not in tune with imitators of the *qaṣīdah*. Writing about the latter, their imitations of the form, Jabra I. Jabra explains: "The wordiness, the poetic diction, was a con-

[8] Jabra, "Modern Arabic Literature and the West," p. 13.

[9] "The Function of Criticism," 77-84, in *Twentieth-Century Literary Criticism*, ed. David Lodge (London: Longman, 1972), p. 77.

[10] See Boullata, *Trends*, pp. 16-17.

tinuation of a tradition of scholasticism in which dictionary learning tended to be of superior urgency to private visions."[11] In contrast, modern poetics makes use of the salient features of classical poetics, manipulating, among others,[12] Eliot's objectifications of experience, and his extensive and timely use of the non-literary, the mythological, and the classical. Poetic texts are a space for a dynamic dialogue, and the modern poem in the hands of its masterly producers universalizes the moment through active engagement with the local and the traditional. It may be an address to the educated and the elite, but its negotiary intertext makes it of great potential to effect change.

Translations from Eliot should be looked at with seriousness, as their timely appearance helped in directing attention towards a non-Romantic stance, an objectification of experience that suited the pose of the poet as a public intellectual. Eliot says in "Tradition and the Individual Talent": "Poetry is not a turning loose of emotion, but an escape from emotion, it is not the expression of personality, but an escape from personality."[13] This very concept encouraged and incited many Arab poets to use masks, as perhaps forwarded and employed by William Butler Yeats and Ezra Pound.[14] Behind these, a distance is maintained, and an oblique view is developed. The past becomes an active moment of present implications. Tradition itself is no longer a static structure fossilized and contained by the dominating group. In the same essay, which was popular in the early 1950s, Eliot insists on this grounding in heritage to develop a dynamic and effective poetic. He tackles issues of originality in terms of this grounding in tradition and knowledge of one's literature and culture. The more the poet knows of heritage, the better qualified he/she is as to be original and unique: "the most individual parts of . . . [the poet's] work may be those in which the dead poets, his ancestors, assert their immortality most vigorously."[15] One's poetry receives originality and significance according to its place in one's culture and tradition, among forebears and ancestors: "[the poet's] significance, his appreciation is the appreciation of his relation to the dead poets and artists."[16] The view gains further emphasis in Eliot's "The Function of Criticism," for the literatures of a country or a continent are "organic wholes" or "systems in relation to which, and only in relation to which, individual

[11] Jabra I. Jabra, "The Rebels, the Committed and the Others—Transitions in Arabic Poetry Today," pp. 191-205, in *Critical Perspectives*, ed. Boullata, p. 192.

[12] See Jabra, "Modern Arabic Literature and the West," pp. 12-13.

[13] T. S. Eliot, "Tradition and the Individual Talent," in *Twentieth-Century Criticism*, pp. 71-77, ed. Lodge, p. 76.

[14] See T. S. Eliot's introductory note *Literary Essays of Ezra Pound*. But for a summary of Yeats's and Pound's positions on masks, see Carol T. Christ, *Victorian and Modern Poetics* (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1984), pp. 33-44.

[15] Eliot, "Tradition and the Individual Talent," p. 71.

[16] Eliot, "Tradition and the Individual Talent," p. 72.

works of individual artists, have their significance."[17] No wonder many Arab poets launched a systematic reading of heritage, with a view to find better affiliations and more intimate ancestry, as the discussion below of the Rome Conference indicates. Translated early in the 1950s, both articles operated positively on the literary conscious, leading to an increasing interest in Middle Eastern mythology, classical figures, and poetics. While inciting the anger of the "old-school gentlemen" who accused the new poets "of undermining tradition,"[18] poets of the modernist temper followed Eliot in rethinking tradition, which was kept alive for Eliot, in Jabra's words, "by the interaction between the new and the old through individual talent, which acted as catalyst."[19]

Both Eliot and the Arab poets are in the process of counter-identification with tradition, but it is a process of selection and choice. The historical sense plays a positive role in understanding change and developing an awareness of the timely and the constant. They oscillate also between counter-identification and disidentification, as poets also fight back the static and fossilized in tradition. The case is more obvious in poetic recreations or masks, for poets identify wholly or partly with a selected number of forebears. In the process, they are aware of the heated discussions in the classical Arab age of the theory of plagiarism, with its recognition of the best poet as a good plagiarist of meanings and original creator of techniques and styles. Many have become aware, too, though at a later stage, of Harold Bloom's Freudian reading of the struggle with the ghosts of one's forebears. In both cases, the great poem may become a "map of misreading" to use Harold Bloom's discussion of the anxiety of influence between the descendant and the ancestor.[20] Many poems in Arabic betray such anxieties. But their significance, if any, lies in the depth and richness of the cultural subtext. It is this subtext that has become the center of attention in the discussion of the ancient and the new, and the constant and the changeable in heritage and modernity. Such are the following readings of tradition and the individual talent.

Tackling Heritage: The Rome Conference

Citing Abū Tammām's (804-845) innovatory stance as both an exemplary appropriation of ancient poetics and a challenge to servile imitation, poets

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[17] Eliot, "The Function of Criticism," p. 77.
[18] Jabra "The Rebels, the Committed and the Others," p. 196.
[19] Jabra, "Modern Arabic Literature and the West," p. 13.
[20] See Harold Bloom, *A Map of Misreading* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1975); and also *The Anxiety of Influence* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1973).

like ʿAlī Aḥmad Saʿīd (pen-named Adūnīs, b. 1930) develop a modern poetics of some complexity and richness. To justify a position, to criticize social and political evils, or to vie for poetic freedom, many poets make use of dedications or recollections of forebears, predecessors, and ancestors. Poetic strategies vary, and masks and personae multiply along with paratextual reference and historical recording. Poetic quality varies among practitioners too, and while there is richness in some texts, a hurried recovery of historical detail may result in cheap and superficial recollection.

But the challenge of the modern in the Arab World since the mid-1940s has been prompted and colored by the politics of urgency, especially insofar as the Palestinian question is concerned. It has also been imbued with Cold War politics and their aftermath. Against imperial and multi-national interests in the geopolitics and natural resources of the region, the political assumes greater urgency than the social, and the poet who is intellectually committed to such issues is bound to develop a register of potency to measure up to an agenda of some sort, be it personal, national, or ideological. This agenda, sometimes hidden and sometimes conspicuous, is at the heart of heated discussions and oblique criticisms. Indeed, we need to go back to Jabrā Ibrāhīm Jabrā's emphasis on the precious literariness of the text and set it against al-Bayātī's biting criticism of liberal poetics to understand the literary and cultural climate since the 1950s. Political urgency itself might have led to a counter-reservation against political engagement, probably prompted by fear of lapsing into jargon and emotional rhetoric. Both positions, along with in-between negotiations, make up a poetic spectrum of varied tracks and traces.

But one way of dealing with this complexity in order to reach an understanding of modern Arabic poetics is to refer to the proceedings of the Rome Conference, 16-20 October 1961, entitled *Al-Adab al-ʿArabī al-Muʿāṣir* (Contemporary Arabic Literature). The conference was sponsored by the U.S. Information Agency and the World Organization for Freedom of Culture, in association with the Italian Oriental Institute and the journal *Tempo Presenta*. The sessions dealt with significant issues, and participants included Jabrā I. Jabrā, Adūnīs, Yūsuf al-Khāl, Badr Shākir al-Sayyāb, Albert Hourani, Simon Jargy, S. K. Jayyusi, Muḥammad Barrādah, Muḥammad Mzālī, ʿĀʾishah ʿAbd al-Raḥmān (Bint al-Shāṭiʾ), M. Berger, Jamāl Aḥmad, F. Gabrieli, and Muḥammad al-Fāsī, among many other discussants and participants.

The majority belonged to the liberal tradition, along with some from national orientations. From among the left, one can probably cite Muḥammad Barrādah (from Morocco). Many in attendance were intellectuals who were dismayed by the growing leftist upsurge in Arab cultural life. Others, like Badr Shākir al-Sayyāb (1926-1964), changed positions after some disagreements with the ICP (Iraqi Communist Party), but also because of a

personal need for attention at a time when the Party enlisted many competing figures on its side. Around that time the journal *Ḥiwār* (Beirut) and its counterpart in London, *Encounter* (whose editor-in-chief, Stephen Spender, was also a discussant at the Rome Conference), were accused of having CIA support. Even *Shiʿr* (1957-1964), whose owner was Yūsuf al-Khāl (1917-1987) and editor-in-chief Adūnīs, suffered such accusations. But it survived attacks and bequeathed its legacy to *Mawāqif,* which was started in 1968 in London. The renowned Egyptian Marxist Luwīs ʿAwaḍ (1915-1994) wrote against these journals.[21] Al-Bayātī was also never tired of making allusions to these events.[22]

While strongly divided into factions with agendas and platforms like those of the Lebanese journals *Al-Ādāb, Al-Ṭarīq*, and *Shiʿr*, and the Egyptian *Al-Thaqāfah*, the literati of the 1950s and the 1960s had to cope with the challenge of the modern with its political underpinnings. Despite their conflicting priorities, one can detect among these literary factions a tendency to copy each other, and to duplicate terms, values, and whole registers of political, aesthetic, and cultural accentuations and affiliations whenever traditions and literary history are called into question. It should not be surprising, therefore, that criticism itself is tinged with a partisan taste or a counter-drive to redress or set things right. Although the voices battling for precedence among the pioneers of the Free Verse Movement were drawn to historical records and formalistic assessments, there were also intentional readings by nationalists like Kāẓim Jawād and fellow poets like al-Sayyāb, for example, to find fault with al-Bayātī's poetry or to trace plagiarism here and there.[23] Taking the opposite position were Iḥsān ʿAbbās and Nihād al-Takarlī, who cited al-Bayātī as the pioneer in modernity.[24] Al-Bayātī's priorities are social and political, but his meticulous care for ascendancy drove him to study every poet, including his living rivals like al-Sayyāb and, later, Adūnīs. Indeed, al-Bayātī's Sufi poems carry numerous echoes from Adūnīs, before the former's unmediated engagements since the early 1970s with Ibn ʿArabī (d. 1240) and Abū Manṣūr al-Ḥallāj (d. 922).

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[21] Luwīs ʿAwaḍ, *Al-Thawrah wa al-Adab* (Revolution and Literature) (Cairo: Rūz al-Yūsuf, 1971).

[22] See ʿAbd al-Wahhāb al-Bayātī, *Yanābīʿ al-Shams: Al-Sīrah al-Shiʿriyyah* (Sun Springs: Poetic Autobiography) (Damascus: Al-Farqad, 1999), p. 93.

[23] Kāẓim Jawād's review of al-Bayātī's *Abārīq Muhashshamah* (Broken Pitchers) appeared in *Al-Ādāb* 8 (1954), pp. 33-36; and al-Sayyāb's response to Nihād al-Takarlī's advocacy of al-Bayātī's pioneering poetics appeared in *Al-Adīb* 12 (1953), pp. 3-9. Rūz Gharīb refuted Jawād in *Al-Ādāb* 8 (1954) and elaborated on the subject in the next issue, *Al-Ādāb* 9 (1954).

[24] See Muḥsin Jāsim al-Mūsawī, "Marjiʿiyyāt Naqd al-Shiʿr al-ʿArabī al-Ḥadīth fī al-Khamsīnāt" (Referentialities in the Criticism of Modern Arabic Poetry in the Fifties), *Fuṣūl*, 15, no. 3 (fall 1996), pp. 34-61.

The Dialectics of Tradition and Modernity

However, both al-Bayātī and Adūnīs are attuned to experimentation. While al-Bayātī is keen on underlining his inventory and reiterating his landmarks in a poetic topography of kingdoms, homelands, and underworlds, Adūnīs dilutes and erases. It is no wonder that his tendency to open up tradition and religion beyond sacred principles passed undetected before the growth of fundamentalism since the late 1980s.

Yet Adūnīs's importance for any study of the intersectional dialectic of tradition and modernity is beyond doubt. His intensive grounding in literary tradition at an early period enabled him not only to manipulate heritage and use its sources in an Eliotesque manner, but also to enforce such a drive on his counterparts, leading a whole poetic endeavor thereafter into expanding domains of intertextual negotiation beyond the impasse of the Free Verse formalist innovation. Nāzik al-Malāʾikah (1923-) dwelt on the issue of social roots for the Free Verse Movement, but her endeavor was prompted by the urgency to legitimize innovation within classical roots and tenets and modern appropriation of classical prosody, as manifested in her *Al-Ādāb* articles which make up her later book on criticism.[25] These engagements with imperatives and needs complement rather than originate a defense of the Free Verse endeavor.[26] Conversely, Adūnīs was to take over the modernity endeavor at a crucial moment that also made use of the dismay among the literati at the growing political jargon among the leftists. Although negotiating his poetics with care, he nevertheless invited attacks and criticisms from associates and opponents.

While poets of the 1950s share an agenda for modernity and innovation, their positions regarding tradition are accentuated differently. Al-Sayyāb's criticism was directed against the *Shāʿir al-khiṭābah al-kilāsīkiyyah*, the poet of classical oratory, meaning his mentor and patron al-Jawāhirī (1903-1996).[27] Al-Bayātī looks upon tradition as a mixture of everything, to be addressed and used in parts and portions. Even predecessors and forebears like al-Mutanabbī are to be reduced categorically to beggars and panegyrists on the one hand, and rebels and dissidents on the other.[28] His Mutanabbī is the one who leaves behind that outworn self, his "shoes," to be up to the

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[25] Nāzik al-Malāʾikah, *Qaḍāyā al-Shiʿr al-Muʿāṣir* (Issues of Contemporary Poetry) (1962, reprint. Beirut: Dār al-ʿIlm lil-Malāyīn, 1989), pp. 7-14.

[26] Al-Malāʾikah, *Qaḍāyā*, pp. 50-62, 293-304.

[27] See ʿAbd al-Malik Nūrī's reference to his joint project with al-Sayyāb against al-Jawāhirī in Muḥsin Jāsim al-Mūsawī, *Nazʿat al-Ḥadāthah fī al-Qiṣṣah al-ʿIrāqiyyah* (The Modernist Trend in the Iraqi Short Story) (Baghdad: Al-Maktabah al-ʿĀlamiyyah, 1984), p. 55.

[28] See al-Bayātī, *Yanābīʿ al-Shams*, pp. 60-61; and Muhsin J. al-Musawi "Dedications as Poetic Intersections," *Journal of Arabic Literature* 31, no. 1 (2000), pp. 1-37, at p. 27.

challenge, which he sets in his poems of revolt. With Adūnīs there is an incomplete process of modernity and renewal in tradition, which invites a further shift beyond fixity in forms and values. His framework for a nexus of modernity and tradition elicits Jabrā Ibrāhīm Jabrā's criticism at the Rome Conference, for Jabrā believes that modernism needs no historical context.[29] As an active member among the literati of the period with great attachment to westernization in literature, Jabra develops a method of reasoning that tends to account for change in the educated class consciousness. The attempt at historical accentuations for modernity bother him, and he is stronger whenever Western poetics is the yardstick. In a later essay, he articulates his early argument with Adūnīs in terms of Freudian competitiveness, garbed in neo-historical terms: for the poet "would have to compete with the great names of the past if he had anything worthwhile to say," repeating with emphasis Eliot's pronouncements in this respect.[30] But Jabra is also attuned to the Eliotesque method of reasoning, for there is an application to one's culture, and Jabra draws attention to the emerging sensibility, as a "history-conscious" one, "there was the new anguish of a vast nation in travail."[31] He adds in bitterness: "The Arabs were suddenly on their own: independent in most cases, but beset by a world that seemed to make a travesty of their independence, with the added trauma of having most of Palestine hacked up into an illogical Zionist state."[32] In poetic terms that have already become the leitmotifs of the Tammūzī movement, he collapses the political and the mythological, the ontological and the theological: "A supreme agony, a crucifixion. The poet's response was severe and radical."[33] Jabra's identification of the new sensibility is worth noticing, as it offers further justifications for his early pronouncement for engagement with modernity towards change. That phase in Arab life was "history-conscious, humanity-conscious and above all, freedom-conscious."[34] The implications for modern poetry are deep and many, for the poet has to deploy his consciousness against evil: "In defense of his stance, the poet would now question and expostulate. His poetry, once reveling in oratory, became more and more of a soliloquy, a dramatic monologue, which soon gave its speaker the look and manner of a rather incomprehensible 'hero', an outsider at variance

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[29] For full documentation, see Adūnīs [ʿAlī Aḥmad Saʿīd], "Al-Shiʿr al-ʿArabī wa Mushkilāt al-Tajdīd," in *Al-Adab al-ʿArabī al-Muʿāṣir* (Contemporary Arabic Literature), Proceedings of the Rome Conference, October 1961, n.p.: Adwāʾ Publications), pp. 171-191. For Jabrā's comments in the Proceedings, see pp. 208-210. Hereafter referred to as Proceedings.

[30] See Jabra, "The Rebels, the Committed and the Others," p. 192. Henceforth, Jabra's name appears as in his articles in English.

[31] Jabra, "The Rebels, the Committed and the Others," p. 193.

[32] Jabra, "The Rebels, the Committed and the Others," p. 193.

[33] Jabra, "The Rebels, the Committed and the Others," p. 193.

[34] Jabra, "The Rebels, the Committed and the Others," p. 193.

with his society."[35] We can tell that Jabra tries to account for the impulse of the modern against a rhetorical tradition, while Adūnīs takes his grounding in heritage as a starting point to establish a comprehensive poetic. Nevertheless, Adūnīs raises more questions and objections, and proves to be more controversial for that matter. The English poet Stephen Spender, as discussant and participant at that conference, has some reservations about, what he deems, Adūnīs's radical shift beyond Arabic heritage.[36] In other words, Adūnīs's theorizations at Rome in 1961 raised a variety of questions and provoked a number of positions of great bearing on issues of modernity and tradition.

Adūnīs: The Challenge of Tradition

Adūnīs's concern with modernity cuts across chronology, for modernity is a constant, or an ongoing process that resists closure and fixity. It is no wonder that his Rome Conference paper addresses tradition as the context within which modernity works its way in poetic strategies that were not easily condoned by classical critics. His contribution has the following title: "Al-Shiʿr al-ʿArabī wa Mushkilāt al-Tajdīd" (Arabic Poetry and the Problematics of Innovation).[37] In twenty pages he unwittingly follows Ibn al-Muʿtazz's (d. 296/908) model in *Kitāb al Badīʿ* (written in 274 H.).[38] Ibn al-Muʿtazz tends to vindicate Abū Tammām and the innovators obliquely and in terms of denial, for both the "definable" rhetoric, embellishments, and extant innovations are already there in classical sources, and the *badīʿ* should not be seen therefore as an anomaly.[39] Adūnīs also expounds on innovation and modernity in contemporary poetry as an old practice: "it is ancient, belonging to the eighth century, in the early ʿAbbāsid period."[40] It is only at a later stage, 1971, that he qualifies his early understanding of tradition by reference to French poetic mediations. His reading of Abū Tammām, Abū Nuwās, al-Maʿarrī, al-Niffarī, and al-Jurjānī, we are told, is informed by his readings of Baudelaire, Mallarmé, Nerval, and Rimbaud. The passage in his book reads as follows:

> It was reading Baudelaire, which changed my understanding of Abū Nuwās and revealed his particular poetical quality and modernity, and Mallarmé's

[35] Jabra, "The Rebels, the Committed and the Others," p. 193.
[36] Proceedings, pp. 192-194.
[37] Proceedings, pp. 171-191.
[38] See ʿAbd Allāh Ibn al-Muʿtazz, *Kitāb al-Badīʿ*, ed. Ignatius Kratchkovsky, 3rd printing (Beirut: Dār al-Masīrah, 1982).
[39] See Suzanne P. Stetkevych, *Abū Tammām and the Poetics of the ʿAbbāsid Age* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1991), pp. 17-25; and Muhsin J. Musawi, "Arabic Rhetoric," in *Oxford Encyclopedia of Rhetoric*, ed. Thomas O. Sloane (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), pp. 29-33.
[40] Proceedings, p. 171.

> work, which explained to me the mysteries of Abū Tammām's poetic language and the modern dimension in it. My reading of Rimbaud, Nerval and Breton led me to discover the poetry of the mystic writers in all its uniqueness and splendor, and the new French criticism gave me an indication of the newness of al-Jurjani's critical vision.[41]

French poetic mediations are not originators of some epistemological breakthrough. Nor are they a sole source of influx. We know that Adūnīs was attracted to Eliot, too, and collaborated with Yūsuf al-Khāl in translating Eliot's poems in 1958. On the other hand, the Eliotian element was no less invigorating for a Tammūzī tradition in Arabic poetry, which has also among its sources Anṭūn Saʿādah's (1904-1949) book, *Al-Ṣirāʿ al-Fikrī fī al-Adab al-Sūrī* (Intellectual Conflict in Syrian Literature),[42] which calls for a recovery of native mythology, with its emphasis on cyclical regeneration and rebirth. Adūnīs lists the book as "the first to influence my thought and poetic bent," for it "had a great impact on a whole generation of poets beginning with Saʿīd ʿAql, Ṣalāḥ Labakī, Yūsuf al-Khāl, Fuʾād Sulaymān, and Khalīl Ḥāwī."[43] Saʿadah's book should not be underestimated, for it spoke in terms of regeneration and fertility, and offered its readings of conflict in terms that veer away from the Romanticisms of other nationalist ideologies. It also placed its argument within a cultural context that accommodated other views and writings in translation that re-drew the map of reading beyond inherited views of tradition. Its use of myth as quasi-factual is in tune with the vogue of mythology and the search for roots. Indeed, it becomes one of the sources for the Tammūzī movement, with its use of Middle Eastern mythology, Biblical and Islamic traditions, and the offerings of the poetry of Edith Sitwell and T. S. Eliot. Summing up these sources for the movement in view of Asʿad Razzūq book on myth in contemporary Arabic poetry (1959), Nazeer El-Azma concludes: "This development is a phenomenon of the modern aspiration of the Arabs and their deep longing to be alive and productive in the family of mankind."[44]

In other words, further readings come at times as illuminating sparks that direct attention to the dynamics of literary heritage, and to the pioneering transgressions of Abū Tammām, his deviations from classical tenets, which

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[41] Adūnīs [ʿAlī Aḥmad Saʿīd], *Introduction to Arab Poetics*, trans. Catherine Cobham (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1990; Arabic text 1971, English trans. 1985), p. 81.

[42] Anṭūn Saʿādah, *Al-Ṣirāʿ al-Fikrī fī al-Adab al-Sūrī* (Intellectual Conflict in Syrian Literature), 2nd printing (Beirut: Party Publications, 1947). It is worth noticing that Jabrā's translation of James Frazer's *Golden Bough* was published in 1957 by a publishing house that took its name, Dār al-Ṣirāʿ al-Fikrī, from the title of Anṭūn Saʿādah's book.

[43] See al-Mūsawī, "Marjiʿiyyāt," p. 49, and n. 56.

[44] Nazeer El-Azma, "The Tammūzī Movement and the Influence of T. S. Eliot on Badr Shākir al-Sayyāb," pp. 215-231, in *Critical Perspectives on Modern Arabic Literature*, ed. Boullata, p. 217.

Adūnīs incorporated in his challenge of the modern. Citing al-Marzūqī's enumeration of these in the introduction to Abū Tammām's *Dīwān al-Ḥamāsah*, Adūnīs in the Rome Conference Proceedings questions classical critical commitments to the pre-Islamic model as one of irrevocable perfectibility and absolute value.[45] Applied to ethics and life, the model, concludes Adūnīs, is a yardstick whose measurements are to stifle innovation. The propagation of an ideal of fixity and immutability amounts to taking the past as the epitome of the sacred, untouchable, and infallible for that matter.[46] Such an argument works through paradigmatic comparison and contrast, for innovators stand for life and change. As for "the ancient and the traditional," it "makes a gravity center in Arabic culture which understands the human as no more than heir and enhancer."[47] Adūnīs's literary mind engages him in generalizations that overlook discourse analysis and empowered cultural structures despite his subsequent interest in dynamics of change in *Al-Thābit wa al-Mutaḥawwil: Baḥth fī al-Ittibāʿ wa al-Ibdāʿ ʿinda al-ʿArab*.[48] But Adūnīs's introductory critique in the Rome Conference Proceedings serves as a threshold for modernity poetics as a constant, an ongoing process whose pioneers in the classical period were many, beginning with Muslim Ibn al-Walīd (d. 823) and later Abū Tammām (d. 846).[49] Language in this poetic is a living thing that responds to experience, tension, and passion. Culture itself should be liberated from edification towards freedom and expansion. Poetry is not craft and expression, but creation and vision, he argues, to vindicate his poetics of transgression. Here, Adūnīs negotiates a register from among many others, to reach for one that measures up to his poetic practice. Leaning on Ibn ʿArabī's (d. 1240) phrase "transgression of the habitual," Adūnīs argues that creativity entails transgression, not obedience and subordination. For his view of the human as an exuberant entity in process he derives support from another saying by Ibn ʿArabī, for the human is a "totality," not a division; a sum, not a particle.[50] It is not difficult to trace the emphasis on modernist principles, including totalization, synthesis, presence, design, purpose, creation, and transcendence, which Ihab Hassan, among many, defines as features of modernism.[51]

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[45] Proceedings, pp. 171, 173.

[46] Proceedings, p. 175.

[47] Proceedings, p. 176.

[48] Adūnīs [ʿAlī Aḥmad Saʿīd], *Al-Thābit wa al-Mutaḥawwil: Baḥth fī al-Ittibāʿ wa al-Ibdāʿ ʿinda al-ʿArab* (The Immutable and the Mutable: A Study of Conformity and Originality in Arabic Culture), 3 vols. (Beirut: Dār al-ʿAwdah, 1974-1978).

[49] Proceedings, p. 177.

[50] Proceedings, p. 181.

[51] See Peter Brooker, ed. and intro. *Modernism and Postmodernism* (London: Longman, 1992), pp. 11-12.

With an introductory critique and a validation of modernism as a constant beyond periodization, the Adūnīs of the Rome Conference has to intertextualize his poetics of transgression within tradition, for the "connection to heritage should be one of creativity, supplementation and precedence."[52] He suggests that while we "are far, historically and culturally, from Abū Nuwās, for example, we are close to him. But we still have our own being and specific experience. While we should be aware of this connection, we have to be aware of our separation from him, too."[53]

The demand for a new poetic that goes beyond the circumstantial imperatives of a constant is at the heart of the modernist drive, to be sure. Whether in Khalīl Ḥāwī's poems, Yūsuf al-Khāl's canticles of *Al-Biʾr al-Mahjūrah* (The Deserted Well, 1958), or al-Bayātī's poems since the 1960s, especially *Ashʿār fī al-Manfā* (Poems in Exile, 1961), there is a common commitment to work out a modernist poetic that builds on Tammūzī paradigms of rebirth. These are summed up as a movement from "oratory to vision, from subjects to experience, reportage to intuition, logical and rational sequentiality to unity of experience," within a search for becoming.[54]

Not all poets share the specific emphasis on the visionary and the prophetic. Adūnīsian poetics challenges leftist poetics, which argues for urgent engagement with present evils, including authoritarianism and exploitation. Leftist poetics shares the agenda for innovation, the creative involvement in tradition, the emancipation from hegemonic discourse, but its advocates insist on immediacy, too, in view of urgent issues. Adūnīs reacts against "mechanical" response as an expression of "poor artistic perspective," as he argues in another publication.[55]

Al-Bayātī's Tradition

Certainly, poets like al-Bayātī also hold an identical viewpoint against the "castrated poetry" of generalizations and clichés that fit into authoritarian discourse and hegemonic culture,[56] but he also relates the inner poetic self to a stage in Arabic life that suffers castration. It is only through an inner

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[52] Proceedings, p. 184.

[53] Proceedings, p. 184.

[54] See Muḥammad Jamāl Bārūt, "Tajribat al-Ḥadāthah fī Majallat *Shiʿr*" (Experimentation in Modernity in the Journal *Shiʿr*), *Al-Kīfāh al-ʿArabī* (Weekly) 301 (16 April 1984), pp. 50-51. See also his book, *Al-Ḥadāthah al-Ūlā* (The First Modernity), 2 vols., issued as part of the *Maʿrifah Quarterly* publications series (Damascus, 1985; reprinted in UAE Writers Publication Series, Dubai, 1991).

[55] Adūnīs [ʿAlī Aḥmad Saʿīd], *Zaman al-Shiʿr* (Poetic Time), 2nd printing (Beirut: Dār al-ʿAwdah, 1978), p. 254.

[56] Al-Bayātī, *Yanābīʿ al-Shams*, p. 153.

journey within the self and away from the factors that have led to this stage that poetry resurrects itself.[57] Al-Bayātī equates the interior journey within the self with an exilic movement, a restless journey among lands and places, which also occurs as such in other texts by his contemporaries, for Adūnīs's Mihyār, for instance, is "Like a song visiting us stealthily/On the grey roads of exile."[58] In a February 1999 interview (in *Al-Ahram Weekl*y), al-Bayātī looks upon the topographical journey as correlative to the inner one: "I have always searched for the sun's springs. When a human being stays in one place, he's likely to die. People too stagnate like water and air. Therefore the death of nature, of words, of the spirit has prompted me to keep traveling, so as to encounter new suns, new springs, and new horizons. A whole new world being born."[59] Whenever the poet escapes this reality, there is a possibility of a new "dawn."[60] Hence, al-Bayātī would not take popularity and vogue as symptoms of renewal and rebirth. On the contrary, he looks upon the career of the popular poet Nizār Qabbānī (1923-1996) as bourgeois and clownish:

> He is not a poet in the revolutionary, human, and universal sense. He is not a poet of suffering, but like those singers who appear everyday then disappear and die like flies in a cloudy winter. As I mentioned in my collection *Al-Nār wa al-Kalimāt* in the poem "Abū Zayd al-Surūjī" [*sic*] (1964), he always reminds me of those eunuch poets in the *maqamat* [*sic*] of al-Ḥarīrī, but in a more sophisticated manner. I described Abū Zayd al-Surūjī in the poem as the disease and the plague in periods of defeat, followed by locusts and crows. . . . This is not a single figure but a type of all artists and poets who have resembled him throughout history, and this type may appear at any time but in a new disguise.[61]

I have quoted al-Bayātī's comment at length not only to draw attention to the diversity in outlook among poets of the same generation, but also to underline the use of analogy and comparison whenever the present scene is at issue.[62] Making use of the synchronic and diachronic, al-Bayātī looks upon tradition and modernity as interchangeably present. They manifest

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[57] Al-Bayātī, *Yanābīʿ al-Shams*, p. 158.

[58] Jabra's translation, in "The Rebels, The Committed and the Others," p. 202.

[59] "An Interview with al-Bayātī," *Al-Ahram Weekly* (February 1999).

[60] Al-Bayātī, *Yanābīʿ al-Shams*, p. 160.

[61] Reuven Snir's translation and citation from Iskandar Dāghir's interview with al-Bayātī (1989). See "Synchronic and Diachronic Dynamics in Modern Arabic Literature," in *Studies in Canonical and Popular Arabic Literature*, ed. Shimon Ballas and Reuven Snir (Toronto: York Press, 1998), pp. 87-121, at p. 99.

[62] It should be noted that Qabbānī is not as pictured here, and we need to look on his poetry and literary pronouncements in different light. See Boullata's quotations in *Trends*, pp. 45-46; and also Nazeer El-Azma's concluding quote in his article, "The Tammūzī Movement," pp. 231-232.

themselves in figures and attitudes, in performance and outlook. A historical literary figure is recalled to substantiate a contemporary image or point of view. Time remains cyclical albeit with deviations and transgressions. Like many of his contemporaries, especially the practitioners of mythical foregrounding, al-Bayātī looks upon the present with a synchronic focus that takes codes, allusions, and historical referentiality as a common property shaped by taste and readership and made available through public education. The case is not the same with Adūnīs, however, who looks upon the present as rupture with a past that suffers from fixity but undergoes crisis, too.

Poetic Career: Ṣalāḥ ʿAbd al-Ṣabūr

But, having said this, there are stages in each poet's outlook, and registers fuse into each other much more easily than clear-cut classifications. At a later stage, Ṣalāḥ ʿAbd al-Ṣabūr (1931-1981) would reach the understanding that "heritage is not an immutable legacy, but a mutable one, for the past lives only within a present, and every poem which cannot prolong its life towards the future does not deserve to be part of tradition."[63] But such an understanding was reached after he devoted the years 1964-1965 to a rereading of tradition, which led him to select and reject various aspects of tradition and literary heritage, within a broad understanding of culture.[64] It was that understanding which enabled him to look upon knowledge of roots and origination as no more than an acquaintance to help understand heritage and tradition in a better light. It should not be a matter of allegiance and belonging, for the more one reads, the better qualified one is to enjoy some portions of tradition, which also make it easy to understand and enjoy other cultures:

> In the last years I got used to the feeling of closeness to poets from all over, from whatever period, to the extent that my literary heritage includes Abū al-ʿAla', Shakespeare, Abū Nuwās, Baudelaire, Ibn al-Rūmī, Eliot, the pre-Islamic poets and Lorca, along with many other figures, poems, thoughts and poetic speculations.[65]

In other words, ʿAbd al-Ṣabūr's belated remarks tend to trust taste first, for tradition loses its markers within such a broad acculturation that endows the speaker with new measurements: "My guide in choosing and selecting within my own heritage is its value in any language, and its voicing of the

[63] Ṣalāḥ ʿAbd al-Ṣabūr, *Ḥayātī fī al-Shiʿr, al-Dawāwīn al-Shiʿriyyah* (My Poetic Career/Collected Poems), in *Al-Aʿmāl al-Kāmilah* (Cairo: Al-Hay'ah al-ʿĀmmah li al-Kitāb, 1993), p. 159.
[64] ʿAbd al-Ṣabūr, *Ḥayātī fī al-Shiʿr*, p. 156.
[65] ʿAbd al-Ṣabūr, *Ḥayātī fī al-Shiʿr*, p. 155.

human condition, not necessarily in its own language, nor its portrayal of its own times."[66] If this is the case, tradition becomes more of a personal choice, which goes even beyond Adūnīs's mediators from among the Arab classicists and the Europeans. In specific literary terms, classical discussion of innovation and modernity is of little or no consequence to ʿAbd al-Ṣabūr.

Allegiance and Difference

One way of addressing the modernity/tradition nexus is to assess representative poetics against the poetic practice itself, its reliance on or fusion within textual terrains, and its exchange with forebears and precursors. The post-independence condition shows a tendency to dedicate poems to forebears and contemporaries. Especially among the *qaṣīdah* poets, dedications tend to commend, embed, and also improve upon the dedicatee. Many reasons may stand behind the phenomenon, for texts fuse into each other, and each poet asserts a lineage, while fighting for a space of his or her own. Among prominent figures, al-Jawāhirī offers good examples of intertextual engagements. He addressed al-Rusāfī (d. 1945), al-Zahāwī (d. 1936), and others in more than one poem to each. In distinguishing himself from his immediate forebears, the poet is conscious of the effort to cut a unique figure, textually forwarded to the readers as the overshadowing one who surpasses the rest. In Bloom's terms: "poets differentiate themselves into strength by troping or turning from the presence of other poets," but the attempt to subsume or ignore a precursor is a sign of anxiety, nevertheless.[67] On the other hand, poets from the younger generation may prove more subversive, as they fight an established form, whose "love of language was heady, ecstatic," for "the poets carried on with the task of reviving words, phrases, and ideas that had remained dormant during five or six centuries of intellectual stagnation," writes Jabra.[68]

Practice of the Neo-Classical Qaṣīdah: Al-Jawāhirī

The case may stand out more emphatically when set against the established neo-classical *qaṣīdah* practice as represented by Muḥammad Mahdī al-Jawāhirī (1903-1997), whom Ṭāhā Ḥusayn (d. 1973) rightly described as the epitome of a literary tradition. Delivering his poem in remembrance of al-Maʿarrī at the Damascus Poetry Festival (1944), al-Jawāhirī, as usual, performed the recitation as, perhaps, the classicists and their descendants would

[66] ʿAbd al-Ṣabūr, *Ḥayātī fī al-Shiʿr*, p. 159.
[67] Bloom, *A Map of Misreading*, p. 80.
[68] Jabra, "The Rebels, the Committed and the Others," p. 192.

have practiced it. Ṭāhā Ḥusayn concluded upon listening to al-Jawāhirī: "Al-Jawāhirī stunned me with enchanting eloquence which is the remaining remnant of the right Arabic literary heritage."[69] The phrasing of Ḥusayn's comment should be seen in view of his own re-readings of heritage. The word "right" calls to mind its opposite "wrong." The poet's eloquence and commitment perhaps recalled poetic figures, like al-Mutanabbī, to whom Ḥusayn devoted books. Yet, al-Bayātī, al-Sayyāb, and others criticized al-Jawāhirī. ʿAbd al-Malik Nūrī, the innovator of short story writing in Iraq, thought once (21 September, 1952) of writing a polemic against the Iraqi critic and journalist Muḥammad Ḥasan al-Sūrī for publishing an article that lauded the achievement of "the poet of classical oratory."[70] As the raging controversy between the two camps—the *qaṣīdah* poets and the innovators—continued unabated, we should not be surprised to find al-Jawāhirī publicly fighting back against biting allusions to obsolete poetics. In the Baghdad Poetry Festival of 1969, al-Jawāhirī made use of the occasion to identify with al-Mutanabbī. Both belong to the same region; and his birthplace, Najaf, neighbors al-Mutanabbī's Kufa, hence the title of the poem, "*Ya ibna al-Furātayn*" (O Son of the Two Euphrates). The poem continues the identification as the forebear's phantom appears to the speaker as if fresh from that last battle at Dayīr ʿAqūl with Fātik al-Asadī. But the phantom renders time luminous, "a shiny yesterday and a becoming," with a "face like a dawn beam" and "glittering eye like a twinkling ember." He is a combination of "the dove and the eagle." They are alike in a world of many Kāfūrs. Taking direction from this analogy, he deplores a present that oppresses the talented and the decent. Both are "*gharīrān*," innocent and good in "a corrupt world, which they are too sublime to accept."[71] Identification occurs for a purpose and the poet uses the historical construct to address an indifferent or a hostile audience.

But comparison and identification are only a threshold, for the poet draws on the powerful precursor and the strong ancestor to fight back Suhayl Idrīs's oblique criticism of al-Jawāhirī's poetics: "A friend of mine, whom I don't deny talent," says al-Jawāhirī, in reference to the editor-in-chief of the journal *Al-Ādāb*, "means to 'deny' the old generation any poetic achievement, as if he were the 'arbiter'of the poetic scene."[72] The poet knows that Idrīs singles him out by this criticism. He therefore foregrounds his response by relying on posterity, for the *qaṣīdah* practice has not been

[69] Muḥammad Mahdī al-Jawāhirī, *Dīwān*, 5 vols., ed. Ibrāhīm al-Sāmarrāʾī et al. (Baghdad: Manshūrāt Wizārat al-Thaqāfah wa al-Iʿlām, 1973-1975), vol. 3 (1974), p. 91.
[70] See al-Mūsawī, *Nazʿat al-Ḥadāthah*, p. 55.
[71] Al-Jawāhirī, *Dīwān*, vol. 5 (1975), p. 357.
[72] Al-Jawāhirī, *Dīwān*, vol. 5 (1975), p. 361.

outworn or rendered obsolete by time. Its rhyme scheme should not be cited as necessarily negative. The popularity of al-Mutanabbī, he argues in the same poem, indicates that the appeal of poetry in the classical mode continues irrespective of its form.[73]

But how does al-Jawāhirī address al-Mutanabbī and al-Maʿarrī? Or to what extent does his poetic recreation differ from that of his modernist counterparts? In a poem recited in absentia, al-Jawāhirī retraces al-Mutanabbī's personal history and career.[74] Soothsayers informed al-Mutanabbī's father about the son, the miracle, and the genius, "who has signs of immortality": "What soul is this that looks upon life without challenge as worthless?"[75] His Mutanabbī is unequalled: "What a sea of eloquence, surging with flowing waves of meanings."[76] As for those who relate talent to affluence: "Brilliance is too sublime to be contained in an elegantly-built mansion. But a dimly lit poor cottage may forward a prophet to the world."[77] The emphasis on this aspect of al-Mutanabbī's life should not be bypassed cursorily, for it fits into al-Jawāhirī's advocacy of leftist politics to protect the underprivileged and the downtrodden. Even his Maʿarrī in the celebrated poem of 1944 is a poet and intellectual of great acumen and, also, modesty: "on a mat . . . with a jug of water to sustain him, a mind and shelves of books."[78] Yet this very sheikh surprises and destabilizes attitudes and habits of thought in a world "on which he ponders with compassion and care."[79] That celebrated poem follows, to an extent, the *qaṣīdah* form, as bequeathed in the formulation of Ibn Qutaybah (d. 276/889).[80] But, like his ʿAbbāsid precursors, there is no *raḥīl* section in al-Jawāhirī's poem, and the whole Jawāhirī address is a bipartite one whereby the poet focuses on the *nasīb* and the *madīḥ*. As there is no beloved mistress, the site itself, Maʿarrat al-Nuʿmān (near Aleppo), assumes the qualifications and connotations of both the abandoned encampment and the beloved mistress: "Halt at al-Maʿarrah

[73] Al-Jawāhirī, *Dīwān*, vol. 5 (1975), pp. 358-359.
[74] In Damascus, in 1935; see al-Jawāhirī, *Dīwān*, vol. 2 (1973), pp. 279-286.
[75] Al-Jawāhirī, *Dīwān*, vol. 2 (1973), p. 283.
[76] Al-Jawāhirī, *Dīwān*, vol. 2 (1973), p. 284.
[77] Al-Jawāhirī, *Dīwān*, vol. 2 (1973), pp. 283-284.
[78] Al-Jawāhirī, *Dīwān*, vol. 3 (1974), p. 91.
[79] Al-Jawāhirī, *Dīwān*, vol. 3 (1974), p. 84.
[80] See ʿAbd Allāh ibn Muslim Ibn Qutaybah, *Kitāb al-Shiʿr wa al-Shuʿarāʾ*, ed. M. J. de Goeje (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1904), pp. 14-15; Reynold A. Nicholson, *A Literary History of the Arabs* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1956), pp. 77-78; also in Stefan Sperl, *Mannerism in Arabic Poetry* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), pp. 9-10. For a very focused critical assessment, see Suzanne P. Stetkevych, *The Mute Immortals Speak: Pre-Islamic Poetry and the Poetics of Ritual* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press), 1993, pp. 3-8; and for a superb reading of the cultural and aesthetic dimensions of the form, see Jaroslav Stetkevych, *The Zephyrs of Najd: The Poetics of Nostalgia in the Classical Arabic Nasīb* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993).

and gently wipe its dusty cheek/And recall, and be inspired by, the person who overwhelmed the world with his talents."[81] As usual with al-Jawāhirī's dedicatory poems, the panegyric is a threshold for identification, and the speaker usually creates a present site, a configuration of multi-voiced opposition whereby dissenters can voice their discontent. Al-Jawāhirī's poetic derives its strength from belonging to tradition in its manifestations of rebellion and opposition as they are accommodated presently for contemporary concerns. Al-Maʿarrī is a great dissolver of habits, traditions, and conformity, another Messiah in the terrains of culture. "The revolt of thought has a long history which speaks of a thousand Messiahs who have died for its cause."[82] The *qaṣīdah* form with its traditional resonance receives a new impetus under circumstances of urgency. Immediacy offers these recollections some warmth, whereas the very performance, the eloquent Jawāhirī recitation, invokes historical transference by which the past and the present exchange places. But this talent is an individual trait in an age that is not very receptive to the classical mode of poetry.

Approaching Forebears: Three Directions

Perhaps one way of dealing with the poetics of al-Jawāhirī in context is to trace the poetic treatment of such late ʿAbbāsid poets as al-Mutanabbī and al-Maʿarrī in the works of such advocates of modernity as Ṣalāḥ ʿAbd al-Ṣabūr (1931-1981), Adūnīs (b. 1930), and al-Bayātī (1926-1999). I shall reserve Maḥmūd Darwīsh (b. 1942), Saʿdī Yūsuf, and the rest for another discussion. The modernity/tradition nexus is already there in the very cultural dialogue of the "awakening" period. In 1944 Ṭāhā Ḥusayn retraces his interest in the modernity constant within a West/East encounter: "As the contact between the awakened East and the modern West grew, intellectuals got relatively attracted to Abū al-ʿAlāʾ [al-Maʿarrī], because they found in the literatures of the West tracks of thought, sensibility, and imagery. They would like to see something similar in Arabic literature, and their desire was greatly appeased when they came upon al-Maʿarrī."[83] He elaborates on this issue in relation to the unromantic aspect of modernity: "They noticed in Western literatures a poetry which is engaged in philosophy, and tackles primary issues. When they searched for a corresponding aspect in Arabic literature, they found portions in al-Mutanabbī, and scattered details

[81] Al-Jawāhirī, *Dīwān*, vol. 3 (1974), p. 83.
[82] Al-Jawāhirī, *Dīwān*, vol. 3 (1974), p. 84.
[83] See Ṭāhā Ḥusayn's introduction to *Taʿrīf al-Qudamāʾ bi Abī al-ʿAlāʾ* (The Ancients' Explication of Abū al-ʿAlāʾ), ed. Muṣṭafā al-Saqqā et al. (Cairo: Al-Hay'ah al-ʿĀmmah li al-Kitāb, n.d.; reprinted from Dār al-Kutub 1944 edition), p. iii.

in Abū Tammām, but it was there in abundance in al-Maʿarrī."[84] Ḥusayn's notion was obviously popular among the literati. Tawfīq al-Ḥakīm was no less attracted to the blind poet "who was like Homer, imagining things in their sublimity."[85] The next generation took even more to the preference for al-Maʿarrī. In his *Ḥayātī fī al-Shiʿr* (My Poetic Career), Ṣalāḥ ʿAbd al-Ṣabūr, for instance, says of the classical poet that "life deprived him of eyesight and disappointed him in many ways, but he sublimated himself, much above life and selfhood, to speak of the 'the human condition', and this is the secret behind his greatness."[86] The implications here are many, but they also explain the Egyptian poet's change from the early Romantic position to the Eliotian attitude, from subjectivity to objectification of experience. In the same place, he concludes, "Abū al-ʿAlāʾ for me is three-fourths of Arabic poetry, and the rest of my heart is divided between Abū Nuwās, Ibn al-Rūmī, al-Mutanabbī, and others."[87] ʿAbd al-Ṣabūr began his poetic career with imitations of late ʿAbbāsid precursors, but he developed a perspective of looking upon anecdotal literature and biographical writing as disputed texts that invite interrogation in view of a poetic career and stance. In his 1980 article on Abū al-ʿAlāʾ al-Maʿarrī (973-1057), ʿAbd al-Ṣabūr debates Yāqūt's story of the notorious scene in Baghdad which, supposedly, led to the poet's self-imposed isolation at Maʿarrat al-Nuʿman.[88] In ʿAbd al-Ṣabūr's view, al-Maʿarrī's poetic career, as it shows in his poetry, is influenced by his loss of sight first and foremost. ʿAbd al-Ṣabūr nevertheless places this within a worldview where even, as the classical poet says, the "most clear-sighted among people is as blind as me, let us battle each other in this pitch dark night."[89] As for the attachment that al-Maʿarrī maintained to al-Mutanabbī, it signifies a stage in al-Maʿarrī's career during which he "was infatuated" by al-Mutanabbī's "stormy and restless life."[90] "Without doubt, he was attracted in his youth not only to al-Mutanabbī's poetry, but also to his exuberant fighting spirit."[91] ʿAbd al-Ṣabūr cannot stop himself from identifying, "for who could have read al-Mutanabbī without finding himself captivated in taste and soul. Al-Mutanabbī has the attraction of a first love."[92]

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[84] Ḥusayn, introduction to *Taʿrīf al-Qudamāʾ*, p. iii.

[85] "Naẓrah Jadīdah ilā Abī al-ʿAlāʾ," in *Fann al-Adab* (The Art of Literature) (Cairo: Maktabat al-Ādāb, 1952), pp. 36-39, p. 37.

[86] ʿAbd al-Ṣabūr, *Ḥayātī fī al-Shiʿr*, p. 158.

[87] ʿAbd al-Ṣabūr, *Ḥayātī fī al-Shiʿr*, p. 159.

[88] See Ṣalāḥ ʿAbd al-Ṣabūr, *Aqūlū Lakum ʿan al-Shuʿaraʾ* (I tell you about poets), in *Al-Aʿmāl al-Kāmilah* (Complete Works) (Cairo:Al-Hayʾah al-ʿĀmmah li al-Kitāb, 1995), vol. 10, pp. 291-301).

[89] Quoted in ʿAbd al-Ṣabūr, *Aqūlū Lakum*, *Al-Aʿmāl al-Kāmilah*, 1995 vol. 10, p. 290.

[90] ʿAbd al-Ṣabūr, *Aqūlū Lakum, Al-Aʿmāl al-Kāmilah*, vol. 10, p. 291.

[91] ʿAbd al-Ṣabūr, *Aqūlū Lakum, Al-Aʿmāl al-Kāmilah*, vol. 10, p. 292.

[92] ʿAbd al-Ṣabūr, *Aqūlū Lakum, Al-Aʿmāl al-Kāmilah*, vol. 10, p. 292.

Yet al-Maʿarrī was to outgrow this attraction, for he veered away to develop an independent mind, which "lapsed into rhetoric" and "reference to classical Arabic culture."[93] In this stage, al-Maʿarrī's style "is no longer imitative of al-Mutanabbī in resonance and powerful rhythm, but more attuned to the self with its linguistic and cultural richness."[94] Mapped out in terms of initiation into the classical in order to outgrow precursors as a stage on the way to independence, al-Maʿarrī's career sets a prototype for the young ʿAbd al-Ṣabūr, as his *Ḥayātī fī al-Shiʿr* indicates. Arab literary tradition, especially in its sophisticated classification of ratios and revisionisms, should have been present in the poet's mind, as his belatedness forges an identity in relation to his precursors, as if claiming for himself another tradition with ancestry among the Arab vagabond poets. In Harold Bloom's discourse, repressed and belated as it is, there is a recognition of this struggle: "Literary tradition begins when a fresh author is simultaneously cognizant not only of his own struggle against the forms and presence of a precursor, but is compelled also to a sense of the Precursor's place in regard to what came before *him*."[95]

But ʿAbd al-Ṣabūr's preceding note is significant, not in view of his further reading of al-Maʿarrī's texts and his suspicions of a frustrated love affair in Baghdad,[96] but more specifically in its emphasis on al-Maʿarrī's style, his linguistic fecundity that makes it possible to articulate his skeptic views within a peculiar vein of ascetics. ʿAbd al-Ṣabūr concludes: "When reaching forty, al-Maʿarrī showed no increase in knowledge, in the language which he had already mastered, the grammar with which he was well-acquainted, religious sects and laws or schools of philosophy upon which he pondered long. In other words the experience which proved so decisive as to change his life was not intellectual but personal."[97] Al-Maʿarrī's *Luzūmiyyāt*, argues ʿAbd al-Ṣabūr, shows unwitting attraction to women figures and female metaphors, as if he were an "unrequited lover," unwilling thereafter to repeat his father's wrongdoing in bringing him into this life.[98]

ʿAbd al-Ṣabūr's engagement with textual clues to prove a personal element in al-Maʿarrī's poetry should not detract from his significant emphasis on al-Maʿarrī's independent growth. When read in terms of Stefan Sperl's analysis in *Mannerism in Arabic Poetry*, ʿAbd al-Ṣabūr's understanding invites further discussion. While making "a concerted attack on all social or

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[93] ʿAbd al-Ṣabūr, *Aqūlū Lakum, Al-Aʿmāl al-Kāmilah*, vol. 10, p. 296.
[94] ʿAbd al-Ṣabūr, *Aqūlū Lakum, Al-Aʿmāl al-Kāmilah*, vol. 10, p. 296.
[95] Bloom, *A Map of Misreading*, p. 32.
[96] ʿAbd al-Ṣabūr, *Aqūlū Lakum, Al-Aʿmāl al-Kāmilah*, vol. 10, p. 299.
[97] ʿAbd al-Ṣabūr, *Aqūlū Lakum, Al-Aʿmāl al-Kāmilah*, vol. 10, p. 300.
[98] ʿAbd al-Ṣabūr, *Aqūlū Lakum, Al-Aʿmāl al-Kāmilah*, vol. 10, p. 301.

ideological hierarchy," as Sperl argues, the *Luzūmiyyāt* dislodge whatever vies for representation to enhance its own presence, "the only remaining force of order," or the "medium itself: speech, and with it the cultural heritage of language."[99] Certainly, ʿAbd al-Ṣabūr himself undergoes change. His article of 1980 is unlike, for example, his poem "Abū Tammām" of 1961.[100] In this poem, he simply recreates Abū Tammām (788 or 808-845 or 846)[101] of the renowned *qaṣīdah* on ʿAmmūriyah (Amorium). The poem draws on analogy to address present political scenes of failure and defeat. Yet in the same collection of 1961, *Aqūlu Lakum* (I Say to You), he develops, in the poem which gives the title to the collection, a poetic mixture of irony and apology. The underlying irony sustains a distance that enables the poetic address to penetrate the polished surface of rhetoric and to undermine the whole legacy of classical literature, including its approval of Abū al-ʿAlāʾ's self-seclusion. The speaker is no Mutanabbī, nor is he al-Maʿarrī to choose withdrawal from the world. He is not the "prince" of poets like Aḥmad Shawqī. He is a survivor who has suffered and undergone pain and trouble "to know the value of the letter/Its emanating meaning when combined to another . . .":

> I know you are generous and well disposed
> And that you forgive my negligence. I am no Abū al-Ṭayyib [al-Mutanabbī]
> I am not as qualified as this giant knight to capture the right meaning
> And I am not the wise poet, the hostage of his own choice [al-Maʿarrī]
> For had I made this my choice, I would have perished of hunger.[102]

However, the poet ʿAbd al-Ṣabūr needs no apology in his poems of 1964-, *Aḥlām al-Fāris al-Qadīm* (The Dreams of an Ancient Knight), for example. Although very much in line with his counterparts like al-Bayātī, especially in delineating scenes of royal corruption, ʿAbd al-Ṣabūr in "Mudhakkirāt al-Malik ʿAjīb ibn al-Khaṣīb"[103] develops a mask which enables him to criticize classical panegyrics as mere hypocrisy clothed in glorious rhetoric.[104] In other words, behind this criticism there is a belief in a need to go beyond the hegemonic understanding of the classical towards another track of thought based on rigorous questioning of standards and ethics of behavior and taste. His poem, which takes as its point of departure a tale in the *Thousand and One Nights*, is one of exposure. It imagines the nature of corruption, which

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[99] Sperl, *Mannerism in Arabic Poetry*, p. 99.
[100] See Ṣalāḥ ʿAbd al-Ṣabūr, *Dīwān,* 4th printing (Beirut: Al-ʿAwdah, 1983), pp. 141-143.
[101] Stetkevych, *Abū Tammām*, pp. xiii-xiv.
[102] ʿAbd al-Ṣabūr, *Al-Aʿmāl al-Kāmilah*, 1993, pp. 327-328.
[103] Ṣalāḥ ʿAbd al-Ṣabūr, "Mudhakkirāt al-Malik ʿAjīb ibn al-Khaṣīb" (Memoirs of the King ʿAjīb ibn Khaṣīb), written in 1961. It is included in the *Dawāwīn*, in *Al-Aʿmāl al-Kāmilah*, 1993, pp. 419-425. On the use of masks, see ʿAbd al-Ṣabūr, *Ḥayātī fī al-Shiʿr*, p. 143.
[104] ʿAbd al-Ṣabūr, *Dawāwīn*, pp. 421-422.

incites the young king to make his journey into the unknown, beyond the limits of corrupt politics. Although ʿAbd al-Ṣabūr relates this use of the mask to his acquaintance with Eliot's method,[105] the use of the mask was popular among Arab poets in the 1960s, as I shall explain shortly. But, insofar as ʿAbd al-Ṣabūr's career is concerned, this use is in line with his recognition of the forebears' potential for transformation and growth beyond their beginnings, a recognition that implies faith in mutability in the first place. He may well have been aware of this revisionist principle in literature, which is at the heart of the Arab theory of plagiarism, if we take his claim of re-reading tradition seriously. Indeed, the revisionist principle is the invigorating dynamic factor, as it entails, in the words, of Bloom, "the subsuming of tradition by belatedness."[106] Awareness of stages and transformations in his precursors' careers reflects also some recognition of personal evolution. Even when not spelled out, these expressions are textual clues which invite cautious analysis of poetic identifications and masks in modern Arabic poetry.

Al-Bayātī's process of identification with al-Maʿarrī, for instance, manifests no need to dismember the poet into parts and positions as is the case in his reading of al-Mutanabbī. The latter's poetic presence in al-Bayātī's text is rife with tension, a struggle to bypass al-Mutanabbī's panegyrics and enhance his heroic positions and lofty rhetoric. The rebel is the most interesting part of al-Mutanabbī, and al-Bayātī never tires of reiterating his desire to fuse with this part. As the poet's next "poem or his genuine homeland is the one which has not yet been reached in pilgrimage," there is an ongoing wait for "the would-be comer."[107] Even if he/she shows up, "I will not meet this would-be comer, for this is the poet's fate, and hence the tragedy of al-Mutanabbī, whose verse I quote, 'restless as if riding the wind,' for the speaker here is the genuine Mutanabbī, the poet and the man, not the other who waits at rulers' gates." He adds, that "the one who stood there was only al-Mutanabbī's shoe, for he was in the habit of leaving his shoe behind and going with the wind."[108] Insofar as al-Maʿarrī's career is concerned, al-Bayātī deems it less divided, but the poet's perspectives vary. At an early stage in al-Bayātī's career (1950-1956) there is faith in regeneration and revolution. His "Mawʿid fī al-Maʿarrah" (Appointment in Maʿarrah) places the addressee and the speaker in a Tammūzī tradition, "like mythical heroes we met at al-Maʿarrah."[109] Both celebrate being free from corrupt

[105] ʿAbd al-Ṣabūr, *Ḥayātī fī al-Shiʿr*, p. 143.
[106] *A Map of Misreading*, p. 36.
[107] Al-Bayātī, *Yanābīʿ al-Shams*, p. 60.
[108] Al-Bayātī, *Yanābīʿ al-Shams*, p. 61.
[109] ʿAbd al-Wahhāb al-Bayātī, *Dīwān*, 4th printing, 2 vols. (Beirut: Dār al-ʿAwdah, 1990),

politics. He calls upon al-Maʿarrī, "hostage of the two cloisters" or the "double siege," to leave behind his self-imposed isolation, for the "land sings, and the sky / a red rose, and the wind a song."[110] But disappointments are soon to drive al-Bayātī into more sophisticated identifica-tions with his precursor. In "Miḥnat Abī al-ʿAlāʾ" (The Ordeal of Abū al-ʿAlāʾ), which was composed in 1965, the speaker identifies with the precursor and takes over his lamentation of personal loss in its ontological contexts. The father, with all ontological and biological connotations, is to be blamed for bringing him into this world in the first place:

> I died, but you are still alive and the wailing wind
> Shakes the house every evening
> You deprived me of the bliss of eyesight
> You taught me the weight of absent words and the agony of silence and crying
> The dead alley is covered with frost
> And the door is closed forever
> Three from which I look at you tomorrow
> While kissing your hands: seclusion at my house, blindness and the soul
> flaming in the body[111]

Al-Bayātī retraces al-Maʿarrī's lamentation for being jailed in the triple prison of blindness, his house, and "this vile body" in which the spirit resides. He also underlines the poet's distaste for a material presence in a corrupt world. But al-Bayātī is after these disappointments for a purpose. Hence, the mask here serves an agenda that remains central to al-Bayātī's poetics despite some subsequent tendency to situate it within an ontological context of great complexity. In that poem of 1965, with its ten poetic enunciations or parts, al-Bayātī develops a number of paradigmatic stations, which borrow al-Maʿarrī's well-known positions. However, al-Bayātī concentrates on the polarity between the State, with its corrupt mechanism, and genuine poetry. The State is the emir of old times whose whims materialize in the most extreme measures. The poet has to challenge these, suffer punishment and ridicule. But al-Maʿarrī, in the same poem, is the one who comes upon self-imposed seclusion as a solution to escape these tides:

> It was a profligate time, without borders
> Poets were drowned in it, they were sheep
> And you were the soothsayer among them
> You were at the feast of the wicked
> An eyewitness to an age of darkness

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vol. 1, p. 268. See also Muhsin Jassim al-Musawi, "ʿAbd al-Wahhāb al-Bayātī's Poetics of Exile," *Journal of Arabic Literature* 32, no. 2 (2001), pp. 212-238, at pp. 224-225.

[110] Al-Bayātī, *Dīwān*, vol. 1, p. 268.

[111] Al-Bayātī, *Dīwān*, vol. 2, p. 24.

Al-Bayātī manipulates paradigms of corruption and revolt according to a careful reading of al-Maʿarrī, especially his early decision to abandon poetry because of its need for adornments, i.e., "lies and dubiousness."[112] Using the title *Siqṭ al-Zand* for this section, al-Bayātī concludes with an ironic rephrasing of al-Maʿarrī's objection to "adornment of speech through lies."[113] Al-Bayātī applies this measurement to panegyrics, especially when they are meant to meet the whims and predilections of corrupt authority: "The *hamzah* rhyme is a lame mule / Ridden by the emir every dark menacing night."[114] But using the title *Siqṭ al-Zand* is not a random choice insofar as al-Bayātī is concerned. Al-Maʿarrī's explicatory note, his exordium, for the *dīwān* specifies a design and intent for his poetry. It is to reach for the genuine and to escape the imitative and distorted. As for his politics, "I have never aimed to entertain rulers and chiefs with canticles, and never praised for reward."[115] Al-Bayātī is aware of this political position, but he is also familiar with al-Maʿarrī's poetics of challenge to the state of things insofar as literature and, specifically, poetry are concerned. To reject and abandon poetry is not a solution, and al-Maʿarrī's *Luzūmiyyāt* is a way to get around the challenge, by manipulating the classical topoi, and hence directing the poem differently. "He re-defines every element of tradition in the light of what he considers morality and reason," argues Sperl in respect to al-Maʿarrī's mannerism, so as to assign it "a new function in a new poetic realm" and "thus freeing it from the propagation of falsehood to which it had been lowered in the past."[116]

But al-Bayātī's recreation of al-Maʿarrī's poetics is not limited to the paradigms of good and evil, reason and superstition. He understands both al-Maʿarrī's deviation from customary rhyming schemes and his ambivalent imagery. Dislodging images from the mimetic and the representational, al-Maʿarrī re-establishes them in an independent matrix, free from traditional usage. The "motifs" thereby "become ambivalent and acquire the intangible multivalence of symbols."[117] Aware of the lexical and pictorial use of al-

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[112] On al-Maʿarrī, see Sperl, *Mannerism in Arabic Poetry*, p. 100.

[113] Abū Zakariyāh Yaḥyā ibn ʿAlī al-Khaṭīb al-Tibrīzī says in his introduction that al-Maʿarrī calls this *dīwān* "Saqṭ al-Zand," for "the spark is the first to come out of fire from flint." See *Shurūḥ Siqṭ al-Zand*, consisting of the explications of al-Tibrīzī, al-Baṭalyawsī, and al-Khwārazmī, ed. Muṣṭafā al-Saqqā et al. (Cairo: Al-Hayʾah al-ʿĀmmah li al-Kitāb, 1985; reprint of the 1945 Dār al-Kutub edition), p. 3. Abū al-Ḥasan ʿAlī al-Bākharzī, the poet of Nīsābur (d. 467 H.), also calls it "Saqṭ al-Zand" in his *Dumyat al-Qaṣr*. See *Taʿrīf al-Qudamāʾ bi Abī al-ʿAlāʾ*, ed. Muṣṭafā al-Saqqā et al. (Cairo: Al-Hayʾah al-ʿĀmmah li al-Kitāb, 1985; reprint of the 1944 Dār al-Kutub edition), p. 9.

[114] Al-Bayātī, *Dīwān*, vol. 2, p. 29.

[115] See "Muqaddimat al-Tibrīzī," in al-Maʿarrī, *Shurūḥ Siqṭ al-Zand*, p. 10.

[116] Sperl, *Mannerism in Arabic Poetry*, p. 100.

[117] See Sperl, *Mannerism in Arabic Poetry*, p. 111.

Maʿarrī, al-Bayātī finds it more attuned to his temperament to play on ambivalence, especially in his poem "Sujūn Abī al-ʿAlā'" ("Prisons . . .," dated 20 February 1999), in *Nuṣūṣ Sharqiyyah*.[118] If light proves misleading in al-Maʿarrī's *Luzūmiyyat,* according to phonological variations and roots that charge the lexical leitmotifs with new connotations,[119] al-Bayātī begins his poem by playing on the various implications of the red and the black as "Two thieves hiding/in mud huts/in river reeds."[120] Color itself derives more potency against a background of loss and absurdity, which informs a pessimist frame of mind too: "Who can quench the thirst of my body / To move it around the Kaʿbah," says al-Bayātī's Maʿarrī. The yearning is to rid the self of the body, and to regain the bones as mere relics of "a *blind man's* childhood / Who lost at the gates of God / the magic of colors." Al-Bayātī's Maʿarrī has the insight to see beyond the physical detriment:

> In the night of my ancestor's Maʿarrah
> My mother gave birth to me: blind
> I could see from among her fingers
> Ships sailing toward other spheres
> And thieves, some of them rule Baghdad
> And other kingdoms,
> Died before birth
> I could see then my pale mother
> Praying at dawn
> Calling on the phantoms of the dead in the rooms of the house
> Who will bury my bones?
> To see them regenerate and grow
> In the mud of rivers
> To make a lute out of them
> For the shepherds to use.[121]

The combination of traditional lore in its pastoral dimension with some contemporary dismay is not alien to the precursor's mood, nor does it exclude the potential for participation in change, in a Shelleyan fashion. With this swerve, the modern poet identifies with the precursor to fit the latter into his own poetics, which aspires to survival and growth. In Bloom's articulation: "To live, the poet must *misinterpret* the father, by the crucial act of misprision, which is the re-writing of the father."[122] In other words, al-Bayātī brings together many of al-Maʿarrī's enunciations of autobiographical discontent to fit into a Tammūzī cycle of death and rebirth that

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[118] In ʿAbd al-Wahhāb al-Bayātī, *Nuṣūṣ Sharqiyyah* (Oriental Texts) (Damascus: Al-Madā, 1999), pp. 7-12.
[119] See Sperl, *Mannerism in Arabic Poetry*, p. 129.
[120] Al-Bayātī, *Nuṣūṣ Sharqiyyah*, p. 7.
[121] Al-Bayātī, *Nuṣūṣ Sharqiyyah*, pp. 7-11.
[122] *A Map of Misreading*, p. 19.

redeems the text from pessimist closure. On the other hand, al-Maʿarrī's mannerism, his use of literary tradition for "continuity and opposition,"[123] is captured by al-Bayātī, too. Al-Maʿarrī's blaming of the world, as manifested in the topos of crafty or treacherous people, is also maintained in al-Bayātī's poetic re-creation. But the drive undergoes revision so as to fit into al-Bayātī's focused criticism. The yearning for death remains as the catalyst to release the self from its many imprisonments: "Let me be free, father, from my cage/For my prisons increase in number/And my sufferings grow prolonged."[124] There is certainly no closure in al-Maʿarrī's poetry. Despite the rhetoric of blame and complaint, questioning embodies continuous reasoning. Its targets include corruption, conformity, injustice, hypocrisy, bigotry, and narrow-mindedness. These reappear in an autobiographical structure, which gives the poem cohesion while resurrecting the medium of address from imitativeness and stock images. While al-Bayātī inhabits al-Maʿarrī's poetic space, the outcome moves further towards a deviation whose significations reside in a dichotomous polarization that sustains tension and disruption:

> Between the rose and the blade
> My soul is a fading drop of light
> And I fade along with it
> We are both to die in this accursed exile
> So why father
> Did you let me be born, a blind gypsy horse
> Who in this vast plain,
> Knows not where to die[125]

There is here an incomplete masking as the poet draws the precursor's autobiography and poetics within his own orbit of exile and wandering. In "I am Born and Burn in My Love," al-Bayātī says: "All are alone/The world's heart is made of stone/In this kingdom of exile."[126] There is another reason for this incompleteness. This identification stops short of masking, for al-Maʿarrī retains a poetic of his own that is closely joined to a view of death as a release from the prison of life. This prison gives al-Bayātī an opportunity to target al-Maʿarrī's villains as agents of deceit, exploitation, and corruption. This is not Adūnīs's approach, for the latter is instead taken with literary correlation in al-Maʿarrī's poetry. This correlation, which lies also at the root of al-Maʿarrī's mannerism,[127] may derive its significance for

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[123] Sperl, *Mannerism in Arabic Poetry*, p. 164.
[124] Al-Bayātī, *Nuṣūṣ Sharqiyyah*, p. 10.
[125] Al-Bayātī, *Nuṣūṣ Sharqiyyah*, p. 12.
[126] *Abdul Wahab Al-Bayati: Love, Death, and Exile*, tr. Bassam K. Frangieh (Washington: D.C.: Georgetown University Press, 1990), p. 207.
[127] See Sperl, *Mannerism in Arabic Poetry*, p. 111.

Adūnīs from its ingenious conceits of metaphysical dimensions. Very close to *al-madhhab al-kalāmī,* or "dialectical mannerism" in Kratchkovsky's terms,[128] this mannerism works in modern Arabic poetry as an intertext of wit, feeling, and reason. Images grow and expand through some surprising and abrupt combinations whereby conceptualizations hold the text together.[129]

Adūnīs's view of al-Maʿarrī is also informed by T. S. Eliot's recognition of the English metaphysical. His reference to Eliot's comment on William Blake shows that Adūnīs is familiar with the Eliotian criticism.[130] Moreover his discussion of al-Maʿarrī takes into consideration Eliot's objective correlative as directed to bring feeling and thought together in the manner of metaphysical poetry. Al-Maʿarrī fits well in this context: "Al-Maʿarrī subjects the beliefs and ideas of his age to a process of questioning in which thought wears the guise of poetry and poetry has the power of thought," says Adūnīs.[131] As life, death, and time are addressed anew, free from the connotations of the theological and the moral, argumentation serves as a viable method to unsettle verities.[132] The Adūnīsian engagement is keen, however, on underscoring al-Maʿarrī's desire to make poetry a means "to discover the truth and to know the self and the world."[133]

Yet Adūnīs's preoccupation with innovation as a modernist constant for classical tradition draws him closer to al-Maʿarrī's mannerism. Working within tradition in order to deviate from its verities and challenge its "established truths," al-Maʿarrī's correlative is literary in the first place. To Adūnīs, al-Maʿarrī navigates within words and meanings, for his "text is an encounter between words we possess and meanings we are searching for." The very effort, with its questioning note, casts doubt on both "language and meaning."[134]

This direction in Adūnīs's reading culminates a serious endeavor on his part to see the dynamics of change within the seemingly imitative and the mimetic. Obviously, Adūnīs, writing in this vein since 1971, the publication date of *Introduction to Arab Poetics*, leaves behind the Tammūzī faith of the early 1950s. Under the impact of the French surrealists and his discovery of Sufism, especially the metaphorical al-Niffarī, who liberates thought and language "from functionalism and rationalism," Adūnīs is more of a

[128] Ibn al-Muʿtazz, *Kitāb al-Badīʿ*, p. 17, n. 5.

[129] See Suzanne P. Stetkevych on Badawi's reading of the conceit in Stetkevych, *Abū Tammām*, p. 9.

[130] Adūnīs, *Introduction to Arab Poetics*, p. 67.

[131] Adūnīs, *Introduction to Arab Poetics*, p. 64.

[132] Adūnīs, *Introduction to Arab Poetics*, p. 65.

[133] Adūnīs, *Introduction to Arab Poetics*, p. 66.

[134] Adūnīs, *Introduction to Arab Poetics*, p. 66.

surrealist than a Tammūzī poet.[135] Indeed, Adūnīs's poetic recreations of forebears since his preoccupation with surrealism tend to veer away from any historical representation. In his *Al-Masraḥ wa al-Marāyā, 1965-1967* (Theatre and Mirrors), mirrors are not to reflect, for they have their refractions and disorientations. "Mirʾāt Abī al-ʿAlāʾ" (The Mirror of Abū al-ʿAlāʾ) in the same volume, for instance, is more concerned with the beholder, the addresser, whose recollections act on the historical substance of al-Maʿarrī's city, dwelling, and grave, in order to resurrect the poet's voice, his language, and, for that matter, his immortal presence in poetry beyond physical annihilation. Al-Maʿarrī's voice permeates time, which, paradoxically, takes a bodily form, whereas speech and language assume a body, too. The exchange of the abstract and the concrete between the "body of days" and the "body of speech/On the bed of poetry" involves this poetic re-creation in a different dialogue of surrealist intersectional complexity. Al-Maʿarrī the person, who has been and will continue to be a controversial historical figure, is a poet whose contribution to poetry is of utmost significance to Adūnīs:

> I reckon that I visited your eyes
> In Maʿarrah, listened to your steps
> I recollect that the grave is walking imitating your steps
> But around the grave sleeps your voice
> As if a quaver,
> In the body of days or in the body of speech
> On the bed of poetry
> Your parents were not there
> Nor was al-Maʿarrah . . .[136]

In other words, the poem negates the historical detail, which has already been subsumed by and, for this reason, erased from memory. What counts, like a tremor or quaver, is the voice, which is so concretized that it endows absence with presence and substantiates and fills the gap with a counter-detail. In a paradoxical inversion, the substantial voice offers tangibility to surroundings and revises detail in a context of deep and intricate meanings. If historical accounts speak of al-Maʿarrī and his loss of eyesight before delving into a study of his genius, the poem characteristically reverses chronology and historical sequentiality. The speaker visits al-Maʿarrī's eyes, which, metaphorically, grow into beingness, negating their historical bondage of the poet. Even his steps defy accounts of self-seclusion. The grave,

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[135] Adūnīs, *Introduction to Arab Poetics*, p. 63. See also John Mikhail Asfour, *When the Words Burn: An Anthology of Modern Arabic Poetry, 1945-1987* (Dunvegan, Ontario: Cormorant Books, 1988), p. 51.

[136] Adūnīs [ʿAlī Aḥmad Saʿīd], *Al-Masraḥ wa al-Marāyā, 1965-67* (Beirut: Dār al-Ādāb, n.d.), p. 188.

which is as obscure as any other token of relevance to al-Maʿarrī's life, emerges as a person, and death itself is denied supremacy. What survives is al-Maʿarrī's voice, which fills the place with its presence. But paradoxically, it resides "on the bed of poetry," as if awaiting a moment of enchantment or transfiguration. This perspective may account for a "surrealist" stance in Adūnīs's career, which paves the way for other engagements, including his intimate immersion in Sufi poetics.

Adūnīs's engagement with his forebears is also worth assessing in view of his own poetics. Speaking of his character Mihyār the Damascene, he objects to critics who "confuse Mihyār the Damascene with the poet Mihyār al-Daylamī," for "they share only the name Mihyār; otherwise they bear no relationship to each other, none whatsoever." But Mihyār is a persona, nevertheless, which Adūnīs cites further on in the same interview as "a personal language, symbolic and objective." Being "symbolic and mythic," it is "more than a mask," he contends. In line with his timeless crossing, the spatial takes over, and the persona becomes a site of interaction and exchange: "a vortex where Arab culture would meet with all its dimensions into the central and pivotal cause: crossing from the old world into the new one."[137] Adūnīs's figures are meant to retrieve a cultural crossing where criticism, historiography, philosophy, and Sufism interact with the poetic in a discursive site, which he intentionally draws in textual terms as a *matn* (text) and *ḥawāshī* (margins). Both reflect on each other, and both are meant to interrogate each other in a polyphonic moment, which he specifies as "something unprecedented in poetics." His *Al-Kitab Ams al-Makān al-Ān* (The Book Yesterday the Place Now) takes al-Mutanabbī's history and career in context.[138] It leans, one suspects, on Ṭāhā Ḥusayn's many arguments in this respect, especially in his *Maʿa al-Mutanabbī*,[139] but it takes issue with others. In this book on al-Mutanabbī, and in his company through an intimate engagement with his personal life and textual presence, Ṭāhā Ḥusayn investigates various accounts of a poetic career and a controversial personal record. His book has its insights into a cultural and political life, but its criticism of the present is there, too.[140] The critic is not a neutral figure, and his voice interacts with the poet's or veers away from it. It has its likes and dislikes, but it deliberately challenges critical insights that build on

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[137] "Adonis: Interview," by Margaret Obank and Samuel Shimon, *Banipal* (June, 1998), pp. 30-39, at p. 38.

[138] Adūnīs [ʿAlī Aḥmad Saʿīd], *Al-Kitāb: Ams al-Makān al-Ān* (The Book Yesterday the Place Now), 2 vols. (London: Dār Al-Sāqī, 1995).

[139] Ṭāhā Ḥusayn, *Maʿa al-Mutanabbī* (In the Company of al-Mutanabbī) (Cairo: Dār al-Maʿārif, 1937).

[140] See Ḥusayn, *Maʿa al-Mutanabbī*, p. 100.

non-poetic bases. The navigational survey and the critical acumen draw attention to reasons behind al-Mutanabbī's revolt.[141] The overall critique is one of assessment and sifting that serves as the culmination of preceding efforts. It is also a manifestation of a new critical spirit that questions historical narratives and undermines traditional analysis, while arguing for "the national character and specific identity of the Arabs."[142] Drawn to texts in context, it offers also an oblique criticism of Arabic literary tradition. Adūnīs could have read Ṭāhā Ḥusayn's and other critiques, for his *Kitāb* is a textual engagement of *matn* and *ḥawāshī* that underscores comparison and relieves history of its monologic directives. The whole endeavor—as a combination of the poetic and the prosaic, the body and the margin—fits into his effort to account for the ups and downs in the history of the Arabs since the Umayyads, a position which he has already developed in his discussion of the literary and the historical in *Al-Thābit wa al-Mutaḥawwil* (The Mutable and the Immutable).[143] Al-Mutanabbī is a locus for "a panoramic expanse as vast as history," he says in the same interview for *Banipal*. He adds that "Arab history is staged in this book as though it were an all-encompassing film, in every scene of which, on every page, showing how multi-dimensional ages criss-cross each other, how the subjective, and the old struggles with the new."[144] Nevertheless, Adūnīs's Mutanabbī is there to test selfhood amid a historical complexity. The effort is larger than any other poetic reconstructed by fellow poets. It reminds one of Pound's definition of tradition as a "return to origins," a return that "invigorates because it is a return to nature and reason."[145] But this is not a servile return, for the poet takes issue with a tradition at large, through its written heritage, as it is handed over from one generation to another. Poetry becomes a register again, but with a number of accentuations and voicings. The historical detail raises questions about power relations, struggles, lies, achievements, and losses. While there is no painful introspection as in Romantic lyricism, there is a configuration of texts that allows also some space for both the self and the anti-self, the voice that speaks, in a Yeatsian fashion, of a lack rather than complementarity. Adūnīs's voice is there, for it cannot achieve total detachment because of the nature of the endeavor itself, its prose and poetry, which echoes many of his early writings.

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[141] See Ḥusayn, *Maʿa al-Mutanabbī*, pp. 52-55.

[142] See Nazik Saba Yared, *Arab Travelers and Western Civilization*, tr. Sumayya Damluji Shahbandar, rev. and ed. Tony P. Naufal and Jana Gough (London: Saqi Books, 1996), p. 183, on Ṭāha Ḥusayn and Amīn al-Rayḥānī.

[143] See above, note 48.

[144] "Adonis: Interview," *Banipal* (June, 1998), p. 38.

[145] Pound, "The Tradition," in *Literary Essays of Ezra Pound*, p. 92.

Applied to the poetic scene, these examples from Adūnīs, al-Bayātī, and ʿAbd al-Ṣabūr may represent the main tracks in modern Arabic poetry. Examples from other major and minor poets are bound to offer deviations and side-tracks, too, but there is here enough disenchantment with the classical rhetoric of poetry. At the same time poets are intelligent enough to understand that poetic practice grows among other texts vertically and horizontally. Poetic strategies reveal as much, for they demonstrate how closely connected these poets are to tradition as a lively and dynamic blend of stability and rupture. Subsuming modernist poetics, its use of masks, myth, and history within a new awareness of the potentialities of language, poetry has been forging its paths within broad poetic strategies, which one may summarize as follows:

1. **Dialogization:** The classical poet is present, not necessarily for the sake of identification or fusion, but significantly for the purpose of comparison. The modern poet recognizes a cultural gap that makes it impossible for him/her to dream of a position or recognition similar to the one achieved by the forebear. In Ṣalāḥ ʿAbd al-Ṣabūr's "Mudhakkirāt al-Malik ʿAjīb . . ." (Memoirs of King ʿAjīb . . .), for example, there is an intersection whereby poets are present as if for a feast, with all the signs of joy and rapture. Yet it is the young king, the mask, who detects insincerity amid that joy. These poets voice a stand and a position, which is made possible through their subordination to, and generation of, a hegemonic discourse that dislodges others. Significantly, the opening lines of these panegyrics are of great classical resonance. They betray ʿAbd al-Ṣabūr's grounding and, indeed, unwitting attachment to the classical mode of poetics. Set against the speaker in "Aqūlū Lakum," the mask, al-Malik ʿAjīb, confronts the reader with the fact that he acceded to kingship by succession: "I didn't obtain kingship by the sword, but by succession and inheritance."[146] He listens to poets, as they "were standing in rows at the door/And poems roll on in abundance/Elegizing the late king, as so pure even in death/Glorifying the attributes of his successor the Just King."[147] ʿAbd al-Ṣabūr's impersonation of the panegyric tradition increases the richness of the text:

> ((An ambivalent voice)) :
> Prosperous joy replaced that preceding lamentation
> ((A happy voice)) :
> No sooner had the bereaved frowned than he had to smile
> ((A jovial voice)) :
> You are a florid crescent glowingly shining[148]

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[146] ʿAbd al-Ṣabūr, *Al-Aʿmāl al-Kāmilah*, 1993, p. 419.
[147] ʿAbd al-Ṣabūr, *Al-Aʿmāl al-Kāmilah*, 1993, pp. 421-422.
[148] ʿAbd al-Ṣabūr, *Al-Aʿmāl al-Kāmilah*, 1993, p. 422.

This voicing continues to account for modes and accentuations in the panegyric tradition. Meanwhile, the persona intimates how bored he is with the "m" rhyme-scheme and, indeed, with the whole performance. But, no matter how critical he sounds, the mere act of conscious impersonation re-inscribes the classical poem as an enduring subtext, for, to use Eliot, "the conscious present is an awareness of the past."[149] Ironically, the poem, which ʿAbd al-Ṣabūr cites as representing his first encounter with objective correlatives and masks through Eliot's "Tiresias," derives its catalyst and encapsulation from this confrontation with the past, its court, poets, and discourse.

On the other hand, in his other poem, "Aqūlū Lakum," the poet as the speaker in the poem vies for a voice amid others who, perhaps, are not ready to allow him such a space. To deflate their expectations of a presence comparable to that of predecessors and forebears, he sneaks into the poetic plethora through a proclamation of his limits. Ironically, however, these limits relate to life conditions as much as they relate to classical criteria of excellence:

> But I passed through ordeals to articulate content
> To combine matter with manner
> To let you listen to me, amid an ensemble of voices[150]

In other words, the poet emphasizes differences, variants and displacements, between his situation and that of his forebears in order to obliquely enhance his achievement. "The strength of any poet," says Harold Bloom, "is in his skill and inventiveness at substitution,"[151] and ʿAbd al-Ṣabūr never tired of the process. The many voices he recollects serve as a foil for his present status as a modern poet in trying circumstances. The dialogic principle expands the poem beyond the lyrical, broadening its scope through the inclusion of other profiles and speeches.

2. **Dedications:** Although the use of mirrors may encapsulate the poem as vortex, not as reflection, these may operate as dedications like any others, which preface poems. They serve as paratextual devices, not only to re-collect forebears and re-establish them in context, but, significantly, to redeem tradition from fixity and dormancy. Dedications are dynamic grounds for great activity on the levels of style and vision. They reclaim space from hegemonic discourse and involve it in dynamic interaction with potency for transgression. Both Adūnīs and al-Bayātī are experts in this arena, as I have explained elsewhere.[152]

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[149] Eliot, "Tradition and the Individual Talent," p. 73.
[150] ʿAbd al-Ṣabūr, *Al-Aʿmāl al-Kāmilah*, 1993, p. 329.
[151] Bloom, *A Map of Misreading*, p. 105.
[152] Al-Musawi, "Dedications as Poetic Intersections," pp. 1-37.

3. **Exilic Engagement:** While seemingly an outcome of modern civilization, with its wars and disruptions, the literature of exile, in its metaphors of dislocation and loss, is no less deeply established in Arabic culture than other issues. Indeed, classical literature of exile lends itself so easily to memory that poets at times borrow spontaneously from its repository. Al-Mutanabbī's well-known lamentation after leaving Sayf al-Dawlah behind could sum up many concerns and sighs: "With what shall I console myself, being without my people and home, having neither boon-fellow, nor cup, nor any to comfort me."[153] Al-Bayātī's Mutanabbī is this person of no settlement, who is restless as if riding the wind.[154] But if al-Mutanabbī offers this line of exile, al-Maʿarrī offers the other line of spiritual dislocation and ontological disappointment.

4. **Textual Apprenticeship:** One of the most intricate stratagems of maturation is this textual apprenticeship, which has its prototype in al-Maʿarrī's poetic career, as he outgrew his early attachment to his strong predecessor, al-Mutanabbī, while simultaneously deviating from the hegemonic discourse of "adornments and lies." Redefining tradition in terms of morality and reason, the prototype, al-Maʿarrī in this case also sets the tone for relentless experimentation within the broad prospects of tradition. It should not be surprising that the modernists agreed on him as a precursor, to be emulated and cited as the exemplar, not in innovation alone, but mainly in the dynamics of textual transgression and deviation. Enhancing reasoning and morality, he also offers them in practice enough justifications to veer away from servile imitation. His mannerism evolves as one of defiance, deviation, and transgression, rather than a mere exercise in virtuosity. The questioning note is to overrule al-Bayātī's early proclamations of victory, for the human condition is more complicated, and national issues may lead to no less than the precursor's decision for self-seclusion. It should be logical that the ephebe reconsiders his career and readdresses the precursor's poetic experience anew. Al-Bayātī's emanating texts, especially "Sujūn Abī al-ʿAlāʾ," offer this textual reconsideration, with a stylistic intricacy that matches his precursor's mannerism, while manipulating intertextuality for further identifications of cultural and social ruptures. Textual apprenticeship proves to be more enduring, for the precursor takes over, even in a later stage in the ephebe's career. But this stance should not mislead us into thinking of it as mere allegiance, for the modern poet also aspires to locate the personal record within a specific lineage. While manifesting enlightened understanding of the precursor, a poem like "Sujūn" comes as a seal to an established apprenticeship.

[153] *Poems of Al-Mutanabbī*, tr. and ed. with intro. by A. J. Arberry (Cambridge: The University Press, 1967), p. 103.

[154] See above. n. 109, on the poetics of exile.

It is the modern poet's proclamation of achievement and maturity. He is so equal to the precursor that he can identify with him, with no anxiety of influence.

This stand may well apply, with qualifications, to Adūnīs and his Mutanabbī. We should remember that *Al-Kitāb* stands for Adūnīs's final say on tradition. The choice of the precursor is not random. Had Adūnīs still been concerned with issues of innovation, he would have gone to Abū Tammām, who, for a long time, had ranked first among Adūnīs's preferences in matters of poetics. But al-Mutanabbī is deployed for a purpose in a book that makes use of his personal and poetic record within a historical and cultural context. The poet's career and reputation, his controversial lineage, glory, majestic presence, and mastery of language make him a central figure in a text that aspires to gather history and culture in a nexus. The use of a major text that voices the precursor's poetic pronouncements within marginal, but contextualizing, interventions and comments, of opposite claims and positions, is a mechanism to operate on history with power, and even retribution. It is time to see through the misery and the failure. Apprenticeship to the strong precursor is there; it culminates a career of innovation and acculturation, very much in line with that of the precursor. But now the poet outgrows association to strive for lineage. The so-called manuscript is not merely a textual exercise to prioritize writing. It is not a postmodernist pastiche. It is a text that its present writer, Adūnīs, chooses to put under his newly claimed name, al-Mutanabbī. This culmination of a career sums up affiliations, concerns, inhibitions, aspirations, and frustrations. These have been gathering momentum in Adūnīs's other writings to be encapsulated in *Al-Kitāb*.

Conclusion

Recollection, with its many claims on memory, reading, grounding, affiliation, and disenchantment, operates powerfully on poetry. Its intersectional space is a site of rich poetics. Modern poetry, with its postmodernist or postcolonial manifestations, offers many examples of engagements between modernity and tradition. These are also rife with tension whenever contemporary concerns demand a position. But to cover the use and appropriation of classical poetics and poets is beyond the scope of this essay, for almost all poets in the modernity spectrum have made attempts to reconcile positions or to lean on "the traditional symbol . . . to enlighten" current practices.[155] We may take the preceding specific perspectives on tradition and

[155] See Khālid al-Karakī, *Al-Rumūz al-Turāthiyyah al-ʿArabiyyah fī al-Shiʿr al-ʿArabī al-Ḥadīth* (Classical Arabic Symbols in Modern Arabic Poetry) (Beirut: Dār al-Jīl, 1989).

modernity as a sort of summing up for directions in modern Arabic poetics. We need to remember this early search for innovation to understand the significance of the whole effort in its significant posts. Nāzik al-Malāʾikah believed in a limited metric innovation to cope with new situations and predilections. Her own poetic career manifests a feminist concern with expression to resist an overpowering masculine language, which she targeted as limiting women's writing. Although such a position could have led her into unlimited prospects for innovation, she succumbed to the idea that classical metrics were too sacred and great to suffer challenge in the hands of practitioners of poetry.[156] On the other hand Ṣalāḥ ʿAbd al-Ṣabūr is for tradition as long as it offers themes and figures of revolution, challenge, and rejuvenation. The sacrificial and the revolutionary make up a register, which distinguishes his career as one that shares a common ground with many poets of the 1960s in particular. He develops his register, however, to include poetry of interest, regardless of origins or roots.

Al-Bayātī is no less engaged with these issues, and ancient poets emerge in their contextual detail to substantiate a masking process, which aims at distancing his own voice. The aesthetic distance is maintained in his early poems, but this is achieved at the expense of a personal poetic. His increasing awareness of contemporary poetics led him, since the 1960s, into larger experimental domains where recreation endows the original text or *sīra* with a contemporary color and immediacy. At times, especially in his poem "Sujūn Abī al-ʿAlaʾ," he is keener on a contemporary resurrection of an ancient original. It is enough to poetize the *sīrah* in a callous age of indifference to poets like him. By the same token, he identifies with the precursor to make a last choice of lineage, which also puts him on equal footing with a glorious ancestor. The poet's voice negotiates a number of positions and views which gather momentum for the single purpose of targeting corruption and failure.

This is not Adūnīs's track, however. Although committed to the dynamics of creativity and dissent in tradition, his experimentation knows no limits, for it plays on signification and erasure in order to offer the reader the opportunity to go beyond the rhetoric of domination and control. The

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[156] In a December 1953 article, cited below, Nāzik al-Malāʾikah writes: "Any cursory social reading of the lexical and grammatical [in Arabic] could prove to us quite clearly that this is a language of people who look down on women." She cites the use of the masculine pronoun as an example. She also thinks that the contemporary use of *ūmmiyyah*, illiteracy, is derivative from *ūmm*, "mother" in Arabic. As I have said elsewhere, al-Malāʾikah had then a feminist drive, but her feminism was not as well documented as her poetic innovations. See al-Mūsawī, "Marjiʿiyyāt." And for her important feminist contribution, see Nāzik al-Malāʾikah, "Al-Marʾah bayna Ṭarafayn: Al-Salbiyyah wa al-Akhlāq" (Women between Two Poles: Negativity and Morals), *Al-Ādāb* 12 (Dec., 1953), pp. 1-3, 66-69, at p. 2.

subdued voice is an Adūnīsian creation, for it needs to articulate its suspicions and misgivings subtly and cautiously to escape repression. Yet the voice may lose its poetic potential in a textual corpus, an excessive mannerism, with unlimited aspiration for documentation. No matter how exquisitely manipulated, historical documentation creates a text that competes with the poetic. Driven to the margin, poetry may lose its potency. The so-called Adūnīsian Mutanabbī manuscript, *Al-Kitāb*, evolves as an exercise in hermeneutics, an off-shoot in experimentation that aspires to entangle tradition and modernity in an irrevocable intersection, which resists further delays and postponements. Prose and poetry are brought together to account for a present moment of both historical density and rupture. Poetry is no longer the same, nor is prose, for the entanglement enforces loss, gain, and exchange. But it remains to be said that poetry in this far-reaching experimentation may need a spirited effort to regain the beauties of language while aspiring to retrieve a past tradition for new generations of readers whose familiarity with the Internet may overwhelm their meager grounding in tradition.

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