

FADEL K. JABR

THE CHILDREN OF GILGAMESH: A HALF CENTURY OF
MODERN IRAQI POETRY

Beginning in Iraq in 1947, a free verse movement emerged, completely altering the way much poetry would be written thereafter in the Arab World. Wanting to break free of traditional poetry's constraining meters, meanings, and rhymes, poets began experimenting with new and different styles better able to capture the feelings and events of contemporary life. Building on and encouraged by earlier efforts at innovation, they endeavored to break the rigidity of traditional poetry and express new domains: the dream world, imagination, folklore, every day life, surrealism and mythology. Over subsequent decades, each generation of poets furthered the free verse movement, adding their own conceptions of modernism along with new styles and meanings. No longer contending with traditional forms, each generation attempted to break with existent modern styles, themes, metaphors, visions and philosophies to create new perspectives and concepts. Such conscious efforts of breaking and creating, or *mughayara* (roughly, "dissimilation, dissimilarity, breaking with the others"), are the focus of this paper. I begin by discussing the founders of modern Arabic poetry, and then present the following five generations of Iraqi poets and ideals. For each period, I will use selected poets and samples of their poems to illustrate the various innovations in the development of modern Iraqi poetry.

THE FOUNDERS OF MODERN ARABIC POETRY

Hypothetically, two critical works of the late 1940s explicitly invited poets to adopt free verse. In the introduction to his book of poetry *Plutoland*¹, the Egyptian poet Louis Awad called on poets to "destroy the 'backbone' of poetry" [*"hattimu 'amud al-sh'ir"*]. Unfortunately, he combined this invitation with the invitation to use the Egyptian dialect; poets failed to heed this former message because of the latter. Iraqi poet Nazik al-Malaika, in the introduction to her book of poetry *Shathaya wa ramad*², gently invited poets to renew the styles of traditional

poetry. She elaborated these ideas in her 1962 book *The Issues of Contemporary Poetry*³. Al-Malaika and the other Iraqi free verse “pioneers,” are the true founders of the free verse movement.

AWAD'S *PLUTOLAND*

The first edition of Louis Awad's *diwan* [book of poetry] *Plutoland* was published in Cairo in 1947. Fifty years later, in 1989, Awad wrote a second introduction to his book, explaining the background and contribution of the original work. In this later introduction, we learn that the original *diwan* was written between 1938, when Awad was studying at Cambridge University, and 1940, when he returned to Egypt at the outbreak of the Second World War.

In his later introduction, Awad tells us, “After resettling in Egypt, I typed my *diwan* *Plutoland* on a typewriter in an original and several copies. These were passed around among the young poets in the university and outside it throughout the war period. At the end of the war, in 1945, I decided to publish this *diwan*. An introduction was necessary to explain the logic of the *diwan*. Therefore, I wrote the manifesto entitled “destroy the backbone of poetry.” In the beginning of 1947, I published the *diwan* *Plutoland* at my own expense.”⁴ From the dates of his writing, Awad could almost be considered the originator of modern Arabic poetry, as he, indeed, considered himself; however, his message, as we shall see, failed to have the impact it could have.

Awad's original introduction was a manifesto. After its aggressive title “Destroy the backbone of poetry,” Awad declared, “Arabic' poetry has died. It died in 1932. It died with the death of Ahmad Shawqi.” The repetition of “died,” along with the startling title, no doubt serves to emphasize Awad's conviction in the finality of traditional Arabic poetry and the need to replace it with something new. He continues, “Those who doubt its death should read Jibran and his school, and Naji and his school.” He goes on to give the responsibility of poetry's burial to a list of the Romantic poets of that time, including him. With these words, he declared the passing of traditional Arabic poetry and its glory.

After this opening to his heated manifesto, Louis

Awad presented evidence supporting his revolutionary view against “Arabic” poetry (“Arabic” in quotation marks to refer to traditional poetry, not that which he suggest as an alternative). This evidence can be separated into two fields. The first is the Arabic field, comprised of all attempts to break the backbone of Arabic poetry, starting with Andalusian poets through the *muhajireen* [immigrants] and ending with the Apollo group (the Romantic poets mentioned earlier). The second is the Western field, divided among: France with Verlaine and the symbolists; England with the sonnets, epics, and ballads of Shakespeare, Dryden, Scott, and Keats; and America with Walt Whitman’s prose verse and T.S. Eliot’s style. All of these examples emphasized what traditional Arabic poetry was lacking.

From the introduction/manifesto, one learns that Louis Awad was working in two arenas. The first is the “backbone” of Arabic poetry, its meters and rhymes. Here, Awad struggled to create new meters with the idea that poetry cannot be bound within a limited number of meters, as traditional Arabic poetry would have it. He benefited from earlier innovative attempts of Arabic poets throughout the ages. His constant search for new styles is illustrated in his *Plutoland* poems.

The second arena in which Louis Awad worked is the use of the Egyptian dialect. In his opinion, the Egyptian people had not produced significant literary culture in standard Arabic. His proof was that Egypt had not produced any prominent poets as other Arab countries had. His idea was that the Egyptian dialect was the true mother language with which Egyptians could express themselves in creative works in ways that standard Arabic would not allow them. Awad wrote a number of poems in the Egyptian dialect that he considered to be models, which he hoped highly talented poets would surpass.

If Awad had presented his first project, that of Arabic meters, alone, it would likely have resulted in great success. Earlier poets had already prepared the way for his innovations, particularly the poets of the 1920s and 1930s who had introduced a new style of writing called “blank verse.” Unfortunately, however, what hurt the first project was its combination with the second project, that of the use of the Egyptian dialect. Louis Awad was not the first or only individual to suggest writing in dialect. Preceding him was the Egyptian radical thinker, Qasim

Amin, against whom the Arab cultural community had battled strongly. The outrage and aversion stirred by Amin's work was applied to Awad's invitation, and the merits of his first project were lost.

AL-MALAIKA'S *THE ISSUES OF CONTEMPORARY POETRY*

Here, we credit Nazik al-Malaika as being the founder of the free verse movement. She both explicitly stated her ideas and objectives and wrote poems in this style. Although she wrote about her own impact, the evidence of her influence is best laid out by her husband, Dr. Abdul Hadi Mahbooba, in his introduction to her 1962 work, *The Issues of Contemporary Poetry*⁵.

In his introduction, Mahbooba focuses on two cases. In the first, he looks at the renewal movements affecting Arabic poetry and its meters undertaken by both individuals and groups over a vast period of time. He names Abu Nu'as, Abu Tammam, Bashar Bin Bord, Muslim bin al-Walid, and Ibn al-Mu'ataz from the Abbasid period. Mahbooba then reviews the contemporary renewal movements including: the *mahjar* [immigrant] poets of Jibran Khalil Jibran, Elia Abu Madi, Shafiq al-Malooq; the diwan group of `Abbas Mahmood al-`Aqad, Abdul Rahman Shukri, and Ibrahim al-Mazini; and the Apollo group of Ahmad Zaki Abu Shadi, Khalil Matran, Muhammad Farid Abu Hadid, and Ali Ahmad Ba Kathir. Mahbooba concludes that all of these attempts and movements did not go beyond transforming the traditional two-line combinations [*bait*] into stanzas, despite their naming their efforts as *al-sh`ir al-hur* [free verse], *al-sh`ir al-mursal* [blank verse], or *al-sh`ir al-hur al-mursal* [free, blank verse]. The poets justified calling their poems by these names because of the lack of a consistent rhyme, so characteristic of a traditional poem [*al-qasida al-`amudiyya*]⁶.

The second case on which Mahbooba's introduction focuses is the pioneering role played by Nazik al-Malaika in the development of free verse: "Then what followed [the abovementioned free verse movements] was the free verse movement at the end of the first half of the same century on Tuesday, 27 October 1947 itself. That morning was the birth of the first poem, entitled 'Cholera.'"⁷ Mahbooba goes on to

detail what occurred after this poem was written, according to what Nazik al-Malaika had written in the notebook in which she recorded events from her everyday life. From Mahbooba's selection from the notebook of a conversation with her family about the poem she had written that day, we quote the conclusion: "Say what you like, I swear that today I feel I gave Arabic poetry something valuable."⁸ Regarding the poem itself, al-Malaika later explained that she had written it to express her feelings for the Egyptian people during the cholera epidemic there. The difficulty of trying to capture the sound of the horses' hooves as they carried away the carts full of the dead led her to discover free verse.

Between the times Nazik al-Malaika wrote the first modern poem in 1947 and the time she wrote her own detailed introduction to the fifth edition of her 1962 book (1978), thirty-one years passed. Unfortunately, this difference in time affected its historical and theoretical value. During this passage of time, many changes occurred in modern Arabic poetry on many different levels. Among the biggest was the prose verse movement which began in the late 1950s with the establishment of *Sh'ir* journal in Lebanon. All of these changes made her 1978 introduction appear outdated.

In her 1978 introduction, Nazik al-Malaika focused on four topics: 1) the relation of free verse with the Arab heritage; 2) the beginning of the free verse movement; 3) the meters suitable to free verse poetry; and 4) the mixture of meters used in free verse. These four topics can be combined into two main subjects. The first deals with poetic meters and the second with the beginnings of the free verse movement. In the first topic, the author searches in the Arab heritage to find a basis for her own innovations, comparing the historical styles of *al-muwashshah* and *al-band* with free verse to emphasize the similarity in *tafa'ila* ["foot of the verse"].

Regarding the second subject, the beginnings of the free verse movement, al-Malaika returns to the boiling climate of the beginning of the 20th century. She chronicles:

"In 1962, this book was published. At that time, I gave my judgment that free verse started in Iraq and from it spread to the other Arab countries. I did not know when I gave that judgment

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that free verse had been written in the Arab world before 1947, the year I wrote the poem "Cholera." I was surprised later that a limited number of poems had appeared in literary journals and books since 1932, which I learned in the writings of researchers and critics. This is because I had not read these poems in their sources. Suddenly, I found that not a few names come in this field, including Ali Ahmad Ba Kathir, Muhammad Farid Abi Hadid, Mahmoud Hasan Ismail, Arar of Jordan, Louis Awad, and others . . . Then I myself found a free poem of Badi' a Haqqi published before my poem and al-Sayyab's . . . Then the researcher Dr. Ahmad Matlub included a free verse poem entitled "After my death" that had been published in al-Iraq newspaper in Baghdad in 1921 under the subtitle "Free versification."⁹

After announcing her belief that "After my death" was the earliest free verse text, al-Malaika goes on to wonder, Can we say that the free verse movement began in Iraq in 1921 or in Egypt in 1932, as others have claimed? She then sets up four conditions that must exist if any poem or poems are to be considered the beginning of the movement. These conditions can be summarized as follows: 1) intention, 2) a confident announcement of the invitation, 3) a wide reaction, and 4) provocation for other poets to write in the same style. Al-Malaika does not find these conditions in any attempt before the publication of her 1947 diwan *Shathaya wa ramad*, which contained a clear invitation to free verse.

In her introduction to her diwan, al-Malaika began with the famous words of Bernard Shaw, "No rules is the golden rule." She then presented the four areas that anyone accepting her invitation to free verse poetry would have to address: 1) language, 2) meaning, 3) meters, and 4) rhyme. Poetic language, al-Malaika claimed, had become mummified and needed to take on new shades of meaning. In regard to meaning, she stated that poets throughout the ages had focused on the outside world and needed instead to express the inner consciousness of dreams and memories. Regarding meter, she noted that her diwan was a break from the rules traditionally governing meters and that this new style "freed poets' wings from their thousand shackles." To illustrate this, she took one of her new free verse poems and rewrote it using traditional meters. She then showed

all the extra words she had to use simply to fill out these meters, superfluous words that obscured the poet's intended meaning. As for rhyme, al-Malaika stated that rhymes have stifled poets' creative capabilities. For example, no epics existed in Arabic as they did in neighboring countries since Arabic could not furnish enough rhymes to sustain an epic. In addition, rhymes weighted poems with a certain routine and often appeared forced. In her diwan, she experimented with a variety of rhyming styles.

Nazik al-Malaika's four proposed strategies for free verse poetry, which she first set out in her 1949 diwan and elaborated in her 1962 book, were adopted by many poets of that time, many of whom never deviated from them despite further innovations in modern Arabic poetry. As we will see in the next section, poets were not necessarily indebted to al-Malaika for creating new language, meaning, meters, and rhymes since they were already using them in their own writing. Al-Malaika, however, must be credited with consciously delineating the theoretical and practical visions of the poetic revolutionaries.

Now that we have background arguments against the state of traditional poetry and the need for something new, we will look at what other poets were doing at the time of al-Malaika's writings. We will then trace further dissatisfactions and innovations occurring over subsequent decades. Iraqi poets will be the focus of our study. What we find unique to Iraq in the development of modern poetry is the existence of distinct generations, closely paralleling the decades. Here, each generation of poets created its own techniques, styles, and visions to set themselves apart from others and to express the feelings and experiences they were facing. It is in Iraq that the concept of *mughayara* (again, efforts to break with others, to dissimilate, be dissimilar) can be most clearly seen. Adding to the make stranger of generations, we find social, political, economic, and cultural events in the country and region directly reflected in the poetry people wrote and the styles they used.

THE PIONEERS GENERATION: THE TRANSITION AND MODERNIZING PERIOD

From 1947 on, there was a rapid succession of publications by Iraqi poets containing examples of free verse

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poetry. The first, Badr Shakir al-Sayyab's *Azhar thabila* was published in the second half of December 1947. This diwan contained the poem "Hal kana hubban," which he considered to be the beginning of Arabic free verse poetry. He remarked on its originality in a footnote, highlighting this poetic style's different meters and rhymes. A long dispute then ensued between al-Sayyab and Nazik al-Malaika over who originated the free verse movement since her poem "Cholera" appeared in a Lebanese literary journal in the first half of December 1947. In the summer of 1949, Nazik al-Malaika published her diwan *Shathaya wa ramad*. In March 1950, Abd al-Wahab al-Bayyati published *Malaika wa shayatiin*, which included free verse poems. In summer 1950, Sathil Taqa published his diwan *Al-masa' al-akhir*. Finally, Badr Shakir al-Sayyab published a second diwan *Asatiir [Legends]* in September 1950. All of these poets, along with Buland al-Haidiri, are considered the pioneers of modern Arabic free verse poetry.

As the literary critic Abdul Jabar `Abbas observed in his introduction to Buland al-Haidiri's complete works:

"The new poetry movement did not start in the hands of these [pioneering] poets complete with its rules and philosophy. It is logical that this movement starts out disorderly and shaky, relying on the experiences of the poets themselves more than on established aesthetic rules. Before the transition period [1947-1950], there was the deep-rooted past of classical literature. In the souls of the young poets a desire boiled to create something new. Even though its characteristics were not clear to them, they wanted something different from what they had inherited from classical poetry. The birth of free verse poetry took place in tense and worried circumstances. It was upon the poet [quoting Buland al-Haidiri] "to explain what he was doing and to place a flag like the discoverer of the Pole with each step he took."¹⁰

He goes on to contrast the vision that current new poets have for their poetry, with its lack in the beginning of the movement. Poets in the beginning, he says, were focused on technical innovation rather than on a universal vision.

However, contrary to `Abbas' idea of a lack of vision in the works of the pioneering poets, we can see instead the

beginning features of the *mughayara*. Poets in the start of the 1950s were united in efforts to make a break from traditional poetry and modernize it. They worked on the topography of the poem, changing its rhymes, meters, and themes. With a common focus against which to react, poets wrote in a similar style. Several years later, once the idea of modern poetry was well established, these poets began to take on their own distinctive styles, keeping similar meters but using differing themes, metaphors, and techniques. A common concern for modernity evolved into personal poetic projects, or a shift from a group *mughayara* to individual *mughayara*.

To illustrate the distinctive styles that emerged in the 1950s, I will briefly present three poets. Badr Shakir al-Sayyab is noteworthy for his use of mythology. Abd al-Wahab al-Bayyati excelled at using symbols as a mask. Sa'adi Yusuf, a later poet of the 1950s, introduced everyday life into poetry.

BADR SHAKIR AL-SAYYAB

Through his books of poetry, Badr Shakir al-Sayyab strove to build his own world, which came to be known as the "Sayyabian" style [*al-uslub al-sayyabi*]. This world was comprised of myths and historical and religious stories and symbols. For example, it would not be surprising to find combined in one of al-Sayyab's poems Ishtar, Jesus, and Hercules. Al-Sayyab also became known for certain symbols, which he used to express his revolutionary sense against that which was static, politically and mundane.

Al-Sayyab's strong background in Western culture and history provided him with many basic technical aspects. Although many poets relied on Western elements, al-Sayyab was unique in how he used them. For example, instead of retelling a myth or story itself, say like Elias Abu Shabaka's Delilah and Samson, al-Sayyab had historical or mythical characters fulfill contemporary roles. Al-Sayyab also borrowed poetical techniques from Western poets like T.S. Eliot, Edith Sitwell, and William Wordsworth.

These symbols and characters can be seen in the following excerpt taken from al-Sayyab's diwan *Unshudat al-matar* [*The rain song*¹¹]:

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THE MESSIAH AFTER CRUCIFIXION

When the mulberry and orange trees blossom,
When Jikur expands to the boundaries of imagination,
When it greens with a grass singing for its fragrance
and suns that breastfeed it with light,
When even its darkness becomes green,
Warmth touches my heart, and my blood flows in its ground.
My heart is the sun when the sun beats with light,
My heart is the ground; it beats with wheat, flowers, pure water
My heart is the water, my heart is the spikes
its death is its resurrection: it lives in who eats it
in the dough that is round
and spreads out like a small breast, like the breast of life,
I died by fire: I burned the darkness of my clay, so God remains.
I was a beginning, and in the beginning was the poor.
I died, for the bread to be eaten in my name, for them to plant me in the season,
How many lives will I live: in every hole I became a future, I became a seed,
I became a generation of people; in every heart is my blood
a drop of it or part of a drop.
[...]

المسيح بعد الصلب

حينما يزهر التوت والبرتقال،
حين تمتدّ "جيكور" حتى حدود الخيال،
حين تخضر عشباً يغني شذاها
والشموس التي أرضعتها سناها،
حين يخضّر حتى دجاها،
يلمس الدفء قلبي، فيجري دمي في ثراها.
قلبي الشمس اذ تنبض الشمس نورا،
قلبي الأرض تنبض قمحا، وزهرا، وماء نميرا،
قلبي الماء، قلبي هو السنبيل
موته البعث: يحيا بمن يأكل.
في العجين الذي يستدير
ويدحى كنهه صغير، كئدي الحياه،
متّ بالنار: أحرقت ظلماء طيني، فظلّ الاله.
كنت بدءا، وفي البدء كان الفقير.
متّ، كي يأكل الخبز باسمي، لكي يزرعوني مع الموسم،
كم حياة سأحيا: ففي كل حفرة

صرت مستقبلا، صرت بذرة،
صرت جيلا من الناس، في كل قلب دمي
قطرة منه أو بعض قطره.

This poem typifies al-Sayyab's merging of mythology and reality into what could be called mytho-reality. Here, he selects Jesus as his poetic mask. When we see the name "Jaikor," al-Sayyab's birthplace, we quickly realize the poet is taking on the persona of Jesus to express his own agony. To control this technique, he drew on words from the Bible. For example, he changed "In the beginning was the word, and the word was God" to "I was a beginning, and in the beginning was the poor." In another example, he refers to Holy Communion when he says, "I died for the bread to be eaten in my name." In this and other poems, al-Sayyab takes on the sacrifices of Jesus to tell of his own suffering. For example, in another poem, "*Gharib `ala al-khaleej* [*Stranger by the Gulf*]," to reflect the difficulties of his own forced time in Kuwait.

he says, "I sang for your beloved soil and carried it, so I am Jesus dragging his cross in exile,"

In looking at the poem's form in Arabic, we see a change from traditional styles. Rather than have each line end in the same sound throughout the poem, al-Sayyab combines eight different rhymes in random order (AABBBBCCDDEFFEGHGH). Instead of each line having the same number of syllables, here we have varying number of syllables. Unlike a traditional poem, the metrical units are also irregular.

ABD AL-WAHAB AL-BAYYATI

Abd al-Wahab al-Bayyati established his world far from al-Sayyab's. He has his own vocabulary, vision, and poetic atmosphere. Although al-Bayyati was not a Sufi philosophically, he chose Sufism and dervishes to express his poetic visions. Among his many symbols are Ibn 'Arabi, al-Halaj, Jalaluddin Rumi, `Aisha, and al-Sahra Wardi, in addition to old Islamic cities like Samarkand and Khorasan. Al-Bayyati also used certain mythological symbols, but in a different way from al-Sayyab. Several critiques, among them Abdul Rida `Ali, believe

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that al-Bayyati was actually the first poet to use the mask as a technique, hiding himself behind the poem's characters. However, reading the works of both al-Sayyab and al-Bayyati sheds light on this confusion. Al-Bayyati's use of this technique is what leads writers to believe he must have been the first and almost only. Al-Sayyab began the technique, but al-Bayyati was the first to term it "mask."

The following excerpt¹² shows al-Bayyati's use of Sufi symbols and the mask:

At first glance, we notice a difference in style between al-Bayyati and al-Sayyab. While al-Sayyab's words are more meaningful than poetic, al-Bayyati selects gentle and soft words close to the world of Sufi mysticism. To accompany these words and this mystical world, he chooses a musical rhythm and rhyme. In this particular poem, al-Bayyati takes on the mask of a wandering dervish to visit old cities where the Islamic empire flourished, places like Qandahar, Isfahan, and Baghdad. In his poems, al-Bayyati softens prominent personalities of old to make them accessible and acceptable to all levels of contemporary society. For example, in this excerpt, poet Omar al-Khayyam is revived. Al-Bayyati's simple description creates a scenario of al-Khayyam into which the reader can step.

SA`ADI YUSUF

Between 1950 and 1960, a group of very distinguished poets appeared on the stage of modern Iraqi poetry. Two in particular added techniques: Buland al-Haidiri introduced monologue, dialogue, and drama. Shathil Taqa had the first flavor of everyday life details. This style was furthered by Sa`adi Yusuf, as we will soon see.

By 1955, a new poetic horizon extended throughout the Arab world. Al-Adab journal out of Lebanon devoted an issue to modern Arabic poetry. The issue included twenty-four poets from various countries. In 1958, two events, one literary and the other political, occurred, giving the revolutionary ideology a practical form. Al-Sh`ir journal was established in Lebanon with the objective of completely changing all that the pioneers had accomplished and replacing free verse with prose verse. This journal and its school affected this and following generations directly and indirectly.

The second event affecting poetry was the July revolution

of 1958 in Iraq. The revolution brought significant changes to all aspects of life in the country. It was the realization of the dreams of many, farmers, workers, and the literary community. This period produced several distinguished poets, among them Sa`adi Yusuf, Yusuf al-Sayagh, and Rushdi al-`amil. They spoke in a clear voice of their mughayara, benefiting from Marxist ideology and the philosophy of social reality. These poets wrote in a simple, direct, transparent style. The writings of Rushdi al-`amil are particularly emotional, far from the complexity of the pioneers' mythology and symbols. Although Yusuf al-Sayagh did not publish a diwan at this time, he was considered one of the high Marxist poets. Sa`adi Yusuf is considered the creator of the poetry of everyday life, which greatly influenced poets throughout the Arab world and throughout decades.

The following poem¹³ exemplifies Sa`adi Yusuf's use of the everyday. Mundane items like cheese, streetlights, bus windows, and a woman's earring are straightforward, not embellished with symbolism, masks, or mythology. Rather than abstracting from it, Sa`adi Yusuf reports on everyday life.

THE 60S GENERATION: BREAKING WITH THE ORIGINS

The 1960s generation of poets in Iraq began amidst turmoil and confusion. The pioneers' influence was still present. However, Lebanese Sh`ir journal and its school, including Adonis, Yusuf al-Khal, and Unsi al-Haj, were adding an alternative vision. The Sh`ir group invited poets to release the imagination and be completely free. In reaction, Nazik al-Malaika published chapters of her book *The Issues of Contemporary Poetry* to set rules about the safe areas in which poets could fly with their imagination.

In these confusing circumstances, Iraqi poetry was in limbo, waiting for something to happen but unsure what it would be. What occurred was political upheaval in the country. Fighting broke out between the Communists and Ba`athists. A massacre took place in Mosul. The dreams of the 1958 revolutionary turned to disappointment. The revolutionary leader Abdul Karim Qasim was assassinated. The Ba`athists came to power, defeating the Communists, but then were forced out when they lost people's trust. Complete chaos ensued. The

Arabs' 1967 defeat with Israel added to the confusion. Poets and their poetry reflected the political turmoil in the country at that time.

Poets were also affected by outside influences. These influences, such as the epistemological revolution, further pushed them to release the imagination. Existentialism reigned. The Beat Generation, surrealism, and phenomenology all left their mark. Overall, the sixties generation in Iraq is characterized by its ideological and literary heterogeneity. However, despite their political and literary differences, poets were unified by the desire to create a new vision for modern poetry. In the first issue of the Iraqi literary journal *Shi'r 69*, they published their manifesto, outlining their differences from previous generations and referring to the pioneers as classical poets. Sami Mahdi and Fadhil al-Azawi, whom we shall soon meet, are two of the four poets who signed the manifesto on behalf of others. Poets of this generation considered themselves to be the true founders of *al-mughayara*.

We have chosen three poets and their poems to illustrate the diversity of the sixties generation. To fully capture the range of poets and styles of this period, we would need many more examples. In the interest of brevity, with more generations yet to come, we offer only this sample and leave the remainder for a more detailed study.

HASSAB AL-SHAYKH JAFAR

We start our sample with Hassab al-Shaykh Jafar, a man of simple beginnings in the marshes of southern Iraq. He is one of the few poets who write of their environs. Later, he was sent to the former Soviet Union to study. While there, he translated Russian poets into Arabic. His exposure to these works influenced him as he took on their techniques and vocabulary. One striking feature of Jafar is his use of *al-mudawwar* [spiral, circular] form, where one line of poetry leads into the next, never breaking until the poem is completed so that all is expressed in one long sentence. The excerpt we have selected represents his earlier style depicting his beginning environs. It is taken from his first diwan *Nakblat allah¹⁴* [God's Date Palm], and focuses on his childhood memorie.

SAMI MAHDI

Sami Mahdi is one of the group often referred to as of Ba`ath party poets. His beginning poetry was filled with symbols from the Arab heritage, like `Ammar bin Yasir and Abu Tharr al-Ghaffari. He experimented with many styles. The 1967 Arab defeat produced a dramatic change in his philosophy. He expressed his disappointment over the Arab abilities in his diwan *Ramad al-faji`a* [Disaster's Ashes]. The following poem, selected from Mahdi's diwan *Al-as'ila*¹⁵ [Questions], illustrates his later style, influenced by French poets like Jacques Prevert and Henri Michaux. This intelligent, touching and unrhymed poem is far from his earlier styles, which used long lines and complex symbols.

FADHIL AL-AZAWI

Fadhil al-Azawi was one of the most active and influential poets of the sixties generation. He was quarrelsome and courageous, particularly when it came to traditional values, driven by his Marxist background. He expressed himself through narration and poetry. Al-Azawi belonged to an Iraqi group of poets called "*Jam`at karkuk*" [the Karkuk group, after a city in northern Iraq]. Other poets in this group included Sargon Pauls and al-Ab Yusuf Sa`yid. Surrealism and abstract was the core vision through which this group expressed themselves.

We have chosen two short poems from his diwan *Rajilun yarmi ahjaran fi bi'r*¹⁶ [A Man Throwing Stones in a Well]. As these poems show, although al-Azawi draws the scenario of his poetic vision well, he is unable to escape from the abstract. No time or place is mentioned. His nouns are left unspecified -- a square, cars, two women, secrets, a table in a room, a river, another time, a mirror, a woman, verses. The poet is uprooted and does not relate to a place or time; he does not engage with the events or elements of everyday life. As a result, the reader is also left unengaged, uprooted and disconnected.

THE 70S GENERATION: PROSPERITY AND LUXURY

In contrast to the sixties generation, that included often

bloody internal political turmoil, the seventies were the Golden Age in Iraq. Economic prosperity abounded in the country after the nationalization of oil and the political stability with the coalition between communists, Ba`athists, and Kurdish parties. Poets, and others, relished in the opulence: With the government generously supporting writers' works and translations, there was a plethora of publications available, including foreign books and journals, all at an inexpensive price. In addition, national literary programs began in the country, bringing young and old together in the pleasure of reading and learning.

In this climate, the seventies generation of poets strove to develop their *mughayara* far from the *traditional rules* of the pioneers and the hallucinations of the sixties, as they referred to them. With the rupture with the grandfather and breaking with the father, poets rushed towards experimentation. They focused their efforts on language, searching in its mysteries for their own *mughayara*, and taking the unpaved roads.

When we take a quick glance at the most significant names of this generation -- Zahir al-Jaizani, Kamal Sabti, Khazal al-Majidi, and Ra`ad Abdul Qadir -- we find their beginnings romantic, as if in reaction to what the sixties created of surrealism and vagueness. This romantic atmosphere is apparent in the titles of their diwans: *Tali nadhab ila al-barria* [Come, Let's Go to the wilderness], *Warda al-bahr* [Flower of the Sea], and *Yaqathat dalmun* [Dalmun's Wake]. As their experiments developed, poets endeavored in the abstract. Again, their diwan titles reflected their atmosphere: *Min ajl tawdih iltibas al-qasid* [In Order to Explain the Misunderstanding] and *Dhulu shay`in ma* [Something's Shade]. When these poets reached their peak of poetic production, they became ever more involved in the adventure of *al-mughayara*. They found themselves immersed in the world of magic, mythology, and old manuscripts. Again, the names of their diwans illustrate their direction: *Anashid israfil* [Israfil's Cantos] and *Jawa'iz al-sana al-kabisa* [Prizes of the Leap Year].

The young poets of this generation were introduced in a special issue of the Iraqi literary journal "al-Kalima" in September 1974 under the title, "The Post-60s Poets." In 1978, these poets had a poetry gathering called "Poets of the 70s Generation." This gathering took place amidst much political

tension: Communists had begun to be persecuted and beaten, and the national coalition had fallen apart. The result of the gathering was the publication of a wide number of poets in al-Tali`a al-Adabiyya journal.

To represent the seventies generation, we have chosen three poets who write each in his own style. The *mughayara* in these poets' works is striking, for they are the most adventurous of this generation. Although none of these poets or works directly influenced subsequent generations, later poets were indebted to them for the amount of experimentation they introduced. These efforts set the outer limits for later poets.

KHAZAL AL-MAJIDI

Khazal al-Majidi is one of the most experimental poets of the seventies generation. He draws on ancient mythology and history as well as Sufism. He recreated ancient myths and Sumerian epics and stories. In his poetry, he uses the language and style of Umayyad and Abbasid books. In his diwan *Anashid israfil*¹², we see a combination of two arts, the art of magic and the art of speech. In this diwan, he is not so much a poet as a composer, breaking the diwan into chapters and sections to thoroughly explore the categories under analysis. In this way, the form of his diwan resembles old texts of Arab heritage. Because of this similarity, the reader begins a poem trustful that he or she can understand it. Only a few words into the poem, however, the reader is confronted with content that appears almost beyond meaning. The reader is trapped, attracted by an old, familiar style and then ensnared in the most abstract meaning. The following poem, taken from this diwan, illustrates his consistent complexity, a complexity that leaves al-Majidi alone in an ivory tower.

THE DRUNK INCANTATION

Beating my organs with wine and invading my moaning,
 throwing my arrow on
 two armies of my friends, a drunk army is rising and the other is like the resonance
 I gave the flag to the white banners and darkness is taking care of me and the towers
 of the years

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wiping with the brownish green my cups and the history of my destruction
Call it fancy, soot opening the door and the fire of imaginations
Call it the roses and a neglected glass
Call it the bud of God's heart in my core and a streaming sun
How did I not fall upon with my sticks a thin luxurious web tied between lovers,
How did I not invent the first series of wines and roses
And I did not throw with my acids the stone, How did I lay my head on the falcon's
wing and rest on its claw scratching my soul, throwing the wind's compass and a
history of red ashes
I put my right hand on a beating moon tying his two sashes to the sea, Get ready my
heart and make your beating a sun in the highest and give life to a group of young men
and wine merchants forgotten in Baghdad and lay down pleasantly under the arrows
holding the clay dishes and lay on the grass singing for the trellis
And my blood is shining with light . . and arrowheads are resting on my neck

رقية السكران

ضاريا بالخمر أعضائي ومجتاحا أنيني،
راشقا سهمي على
جيشين من صحبي، جيش ثمل يعلو وجيش كالرنين
أعقد البيروق الألوية البيضاء والظلمة ترعاني وأبراج السنين
ماسحا بالأخضر البني أقداحي وتاريخ خرابي
سمه وهما هبابا يفتح الباب ونار الأخيلة
سمه الورد وكأسا مهملة
سمه برعم قلب الله في لبي وشمسا سائلة
كيف لم أهو بأعوادي على نسج نحيل مترف يلتز بين العاشقين،
كيف لم أبتكر السلسلة الأولى من الخمرة والورد
ولم أرم بأحماضي الحجارة، كيف وسدت جناح الباز وارتحت
على مخالبه يخدش روحي، راميا بوصلة الريح وتاريخ رماد أحمر
ألقي يميني فوق بدر خافق يربط زناربه بالبحر، تهباً يا فؤادي
وليكّن نبضك شمسا في الأعالي وامنح العمر الى زمرة فتيان وخمارين
منسبين في بغداد واستلق شهيا في النبال
ماسكا أنية الطين وملقيا على العشب أغني للدوالي
ودمي يشرق بالنور.. وترتاح على نحري نصالي.

RA`AD ABDUL QADIR

As with Khazal al-Majidi, Ra`ad Abdul Qadir also bases his poems on old texts. However, while al-Majidi used these texts for the content of his poems, Abdul Qadir used them for the form. He was particularly attracted to the calligraphy of

texts. His diwan *Jarwa'iz al-sana al-kabisa*¹⁸ is full of poems in old, handwritten manuscript form. I have selected one example, “Qita al-wajud” [The cat of existence], which I leave untranslated to emphasize the visual effect.



HASHIM SHAFIQ

Hashim Shafiq represents the Marxist poets of this generation who left the country in the late 1970s because of the political circumstances. His style, like other Marxist poets, is a complete contrast to the preceding two poets. Shafiq writes about the masses for the masses. He was influenced by Sa`adi Yusuf, the Marxist and godfather poet of the Arabic everyday poetry, whom we met in the fifties generation. While interested in the concrete and everyday details, Shafiq also adds art to his composition.

The following poem, “*Al-rafa*”¹⁹ [The Darner], illustrates a common theme of the “everyday life” school of poetry, that of things “*sh`abi*” [folksy, of the people]. The character of the danner represents one of the most “*sh`abi*” professions: Almost all of his clientele are poor people who must have their clothes repaired rather than replaced. Through Shafiq’s snapshot of the danner’s

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shop, we enter his toils and those of his customers. Although preoccupied with removing life's marks from the clothes of the ironsmith, farmer, barber, and baker, the darner cannot mend his own situation -- his shop, hands, memory, present, or future. It is here we see Shafiq's divergence from other poets of the everyday: He combines cultured thoughts with his sh`abi descriptions, providing philosophical reflections on these everyday situations to produce "cultural sh`abi" poetry. While, for example, any of Sa`adi Yusuf's poems remain grounded in concrete details, Shafiq comments on "the hole in the past and tear in the future," or "a mouse nibbling on the outermost parts of senility." Shafiq offers us a scene, mood, and reflection.

THE DARNER

The darner is sitting in a shop passed through by sidewalks, On the bench
are clothes of the sellers and grocers, The uniform of an ironsmith stamped with the
smoke of the forge,
and the robes of farmers with holes of bilharzias, and the robe of the barber wounded
by the blade of the creditor, On the bench are the baker's pants extinguished by
embers,
And in the shop, uncountable cracks, a hole in the wall, lizards on the ceiling,
a daddy longlegs on the gypsum falling like the little leaves of the *nabak* and the
mulberry tree,
and under the seat a mouse nibbling the outermost parts of senility, This is a rat
opening
tunnels in the night and in the plague, This is a woodworm, gnawing even
the memory,
walking in it, walking on the lacerated wood, There is a hole in
the past, There is a tear in the present, There are wells or holes in the darner's palm,
And the darner examines the needle with the thread, and forgets to sew up the cut
hand,
forgets to sew up the bench, the wall, and the memory.

الرفاء

الرائف يجلس في دكان مخروم بالأرصفة، فوق الدكة
ألبسة الباعة والبقالين، وبدلة حداد ختمت بدخان الكور،
وأردية الفلاحين المثقوبة بالبهارزيا، ورداء الحلاق المجروح
بموس الدائن، فوق الدكة سروال الخباز المطفأ بالجمر، وفي

الذكان، فتوق لا تحصي، في الحائط نقب، في السقف حرازين،
رتبلاء فوق الحص المتساقط مثل وريقات النبق، والتوت،
وتحت المقعد فأر يقرض أطراف الشيوخة، هذا جرد يفتح
أنفاقا في الليل وفي الطاعون، وهذا سوس، ينخر حتى
الذكري،
يمشي فيها، ويسير على الخشب المتهرئ، ثمة نقب في
الماضي،

ثمة شق في الحاضر، ثمة آبار أو حفر في كف الرائف، والرائف
يمتحن الابرّة بالخيط، وينسى ترتيق الكف المثلومة،
ينسى ترتيق
الدكة والحائط والذكري.

THE 80S GENERATION: WAR GENERATION

In the beginning of 1980, the first Gulf War between Iraq and Iran broke out. The eighties generation of poets ripened on the fire of the war. Prior to this, these poets coexisted with the seventies generation, and, until their own mughayara, wrote in similar styles to them. They published in the same journal of the seventies generation, *al-Tali`a al-Adabiyya*, and appeared alongside them in the journal's publication *Al-mauja al-jadida*²⁰ [The New Wave].

After several years of the war, necessity pushed these poets, who represented the tension of their peers, to make a rupture with the visions of the former generations and to build new styles and techniques better suited to the absurd world around them. One source of agitation for these poets was the disconnectedness of the seventies generation poets, who were absorbed in their magic, mythology, abstract and old manuscripts. For these reasons, they were forced to create their own visions of mughayara from the reality that surrounded them. If we take a quick look at the names of some of the diwans of the 80s generation, we realize the tragic situation in the country demanding to be expressed: *Sama'fi khutha* [A Sky in a Helmet], *Al-asafir la tuhibbu al-rasas* [Sparrows Don't Like Bullets], *Ilhaqan bi al-maut al-sabiq* [Connected to the Previous Death], *Hidadan `ala ma tabaqa* [Mourning Over What Remains], and *Nazif al-Bahr* [The Bleeding of the Sea].

The eighties generation is characterized by a plenitude

of poets, a richness of styles, and openness to a variety of sources of creativity. During the 1980s, literary journals and activities were devoted to supporting the war, soldiers, and government. To protest the large numbers being killed or taken prisoner, poets had to create new styles where their objections could be stated but remain hidden, for survival purposes. Prose verse emerged at this time, as it allowed for ambiguity and multi-interpretation. Poets also hid behind characters from the historical or mythological past. This generation's poets faced the challenge of writing poems that could not only equal the magnitude of the war, with all its inhumanity, but also conceal their denunciation.

In 1986, *Asfar* literary journal began, as the voice of the eighties generation. Poets continued to publish in *al-Tali`a al-Adabiyya*, taking advantage of any opportunity to make their voices heard in a pro-war atmosphere. In 1987, poets prepared a special issue in *Huras al-Watan*²¹ journal, in the literary section of this military magazine, headed and edited by poet Adnan al-Sayigh. Fourteen poets wrote of their personal experiences and philosophies. It was in this issue's introduction, considered a manifesto, that the eighties generation named themselves "the War Generation," although knowing that this name would most likely anger the authorities. In this issue, poets announced their literary visions contrary to the prevailing ones. In 1988, *Asfar*²² journal published a special issue for the eighties generation, representing the full variety of poets' visions and styles. Thirty-six poets contributed their works, along with articles by literary critics and personal essays by poets.

We have selected three poets to give a flavor of the eighties generation. The three are among the most popular of their time. Each published many works, making their art and styles solid.

ADNAN AL-SAYIGH

Adnan al-Sayigh started his poetic life in a quick jump. He published his first poems in local newspapers, and suddenly grabbed the attention of the literary community. Immediately, critics mentioned his name as one of the promising poets of this generation. What attracted this attention was that al-Sayigh

wrote from the front, expressing his experiences and feelings honestly and openly, away from the war propaganda. His first diwan was soon published, as the authorities tried to bring him into their propaganda efforts. The secret of Adnan al-Sayigh's phenomenon of at that time was that he provided a restful break from the war propaganda that occupied all media. He wrote about love, soft aspects of everyday life like interactions with his children and friends, topics that were missing from the war mill.

Al-Sayigh developed his style from several different schools. He borrowed from al-Bayyati, Sa`adi Yusuf, and Yusuf al-Sayigh (no relation) to create his own style. The following poem shows his ability to take a position, comment on it, and still leave the reader comforted. Here, he draws on his own experience of being a soldier, but then steps outside to judge the situation. Although very much against the war, al-Sayigh hides his position behind irony and wit, as we see in the last line. This is a technique he shares with others of his generation, stating but hiding. Al-Sayigh also hides his opinion by turning the sad and tragic death of a martyr into something pleasant.

IN THE GARDEN OF THE UNKNOWN SOLDIER

The soldier, who forgot to shave his beard that morning
 So, the sergeant punished him
 The fallen soldier, whom they forgot in the dust of the battlefield
 The dreaming soldier, with his thick beard
 that began to grow, bit by bit
 until it became -- after ten years --
 a forest entangled with branches
 Nightingales sang in it
 children played on its swings
 and lovers embraced under its shadows
 The soldier . .
 who became a park for the city
 What if he had shaved his beard that morning?!

في حديقة الجندي المجهول

الجندي، الذي نسي أن يخلق ذقنه، ذلك الصباح
 فعاقبه العريف

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الجندي القتيل، الذي نسوه في غبار الميدان
الجندي الحالم، بلحيته الكثة
التي أخذت تنمو، شيئاً فشيئاً
حتى أصبحت بعد عشر سنوات .
غاية متشابكة الأغصان
تصدح فيها البلابل
ويلهو في أراجيحها الصبيان
ويتعانق تحت أفيائها العشاق
الجندي...
الذي غدا منتزها للمدينة
ماذا لو كان قد حلق ذقنه، ذلك الصباح!؟

SIHAM JABBAR

Although Siham Jabbar's experience in writing poetry was not long, she was able to put her name in a high position in a short time. This was mainly because she chose unfamiliar, fresh topics about which to write. Unlike Adnan al-Sayigh, Jabbar's poetry is difficult to grasp. It is complicated and can be read at many levels and directions. Jabbar represents the style of a large number of eighties generation poets, those whose writings combine words without necessarily making the meaning clear. Among Jabbar's influences are Adonis, Saint Jean Burse, and Jacques Prevert. She is one of the few women poets in Iraq who emphasizes her womanhood and draws on it in her poetry. Her poetry shows a strong talent and cultured background, perhaps from her doctoral degree in Arabic literature. Although Siham Jabbar often writes in long lines of poetry, we have selected an excerpt with short lines, simply for the ease of translating. The excerpt²³ shows the mixture of irony, surrealism, and fantasy that Jabbar often uses in her poetry.

TEXTS

* Forgetfulness came back to me
I'm pregnant again
with his daughter, memory
* Among the ants all cried
for the one always drowning
in the crying

* I have little ones returning to the eggs
and countries departing from the departure
and crying providing the earth with graves
* What do I want in order to shoot?
The goal is in me
and the balls are from all!
* The moon climbed to the crow
and your stick is brushing against my corroded whiteness
Are you pecking until . . . we become extinct!
[. . .]

نصوص

* عاد النسيان اليّ
أحبل من جديد
بابنته الذاكرة.
* في النمل بكى الجميع
على واحدة تغرق دائما
في البكاء.
* لدي صغار تعاد الى البيوض
وأوطان ترحل عن الرحيل
ويكاء يمد الأرض بالقبور.
* ماذا أريد كي أصيب؟
الهدف فيّ
والكرات من الجميع!
* سعد القمر الى الغراب
وعصاك تتوش بياضي المتأكل
هل تنقر حتى... ننقرض!
[...]

ABDUL RAZAQ AL-RUBAYIE²⁴

Abdul Razzaq al-Rubayie is one of the most remarkable poets of the 80's generation. He started his literary life writing poetry for children in the early 1970. His poetry for adults grew up year by year alongside his poetry for children. We can still find some childlike aspects in his later poetry. Although it was not his intention, he reminds the reader of William Blake, who also wrote about children's world and innocence. In addition to being a poet, al-Rubayie is a professional journalist in the literary field. Knowing these two aspects of his background helps us understand his skill at reporting in his

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poetry. He experimented with many styles, including using mythology, history, and folklore. Similar to Adnan al-Sayigh, al-Rubayie also writes about the everyday. However, he deepens matters by adding historical, mythological, and personal symbols, but never becomes as complicated as Siham Jabbar's poetry, for instance. The sense of drama found in his poetry comes from his being a playwright as well.

The following poem, taken from his first *dirwan*, shows the various horizons in which al-Rubayie moves within a poem. He begins with the everyday, almost universal situation of receiving a phone call. He deepens this simple act by philosophizing, reflecting on love, friendship, a spirit, and savior through history -- personal and political -- and social comment. Finally, he ends his torment with humor, in his characteristic ability to laugh at himself entangled in life's predicaments.

CONFUSION

The telephone rang . . .

Who's calling me on this night?

A woman?

I hid the splinters of my heart in a box
and threw the box to the bottom of the sea
in order not to fall in love and become crazy

The telephone is still ringing . . .

A friend?

the thrust of Brutus' sword is still bleeding bitter blood
And Caesar is crying in the square of Rome
and yearning for his lifelong friends

The telephone is still ringing . . .

A spirit surprised by the night's cold?

I am only a sad man crying in the middle of the night
bothered by the ring of the telephone

I am only . . .

Who said that I am a god
that the poor call on and jinn are afraid of?

The telephone is still ringing . . .

A caged sparrow?

The world is a prison
whenever one prison is closed down
another prison will shout in the far distance

The telephone is still ringing . . .
I ask myself:
Why not pick up this wound's receiver?
Perhaps I will be surprised on this night
by a savior or good news
Why not pick it up?
Pick it up . . . Pick it up . . . Pick up . . .
The telephone stopped ringing.

إرتباك

رَنَ الهاتف..
من يطلبني في هذا الليل؟
امرأة؟
خبأت شظايا القلب بصندوق
ورميت الصندوق بقاع البحر
لئلا يهوى ويجنَّ
الهاتف ما زال يرَنَ
صديق؟
ما زالت طعنة سيف بروتس تنز دما
والقيصر في ساحة روما يبكي
ولأصحاب الدرب يحنَّ
الهاتف ما زال يرَنَ
روح داهمها برد الليل؟
أنا لست سوى رجل محزون
يبكي في منتصف الليل
يشاكسه جرس الهاتف
لست سوى...
من قال بأني رب يقصده الفقراء
وترهبه الجنَّ
الهاتف ما زال يرَنَ
عصفور مأسور؟
العالم سجن
ان تفتح سجنا صاح بأعلى غريته سجن
الهاتف ما زال يرَنَ
أسائل نفسي:
لم لا أرفع سماعة هذا الجرح؟
فريتما داهمني في هذا الليل
رسول خلاص أو بشرى!
لم لا أرفعها؟

ارفعها.. أرفعها.. أرفع..
سكن الهاتف!!

THE 90S GENERATION: SANCTIONED VERSE

It seems that the journey of the *mughayara* has its logic and starting points, in poetry as in life. We now have a new generation of poets, calling themselves the nineties generation. At this point, we cannot speak in detail about this generation's *mughayara* since they are at the beginning stage of choosing their poetic vision. Most of these poets grew up alongside the environment of the eighties generation. This is why they currently resemble poets of the eighties in their overall philosophy. However, this is likely to change, as it did when the eighties generation broke with the seventies generation.

We suggest for this generation of poets the name "The Embargo Generation" because they are standing, like the rest of the society inside Iraq, with their arms bound, facing the catastrophe. Although they are trying to make their voices reach the furthest possible audiences, they are restricted. Poets in Iraq face a shortage of paper and printing materials, severely reducing the number and size of journals, newspapers, and books available. They are unable to publish or to travel to poetry festivals, being without regular jobs or salaries.

Fortunately, we have been able to receive *diwans* from poets of the nineties generation inside Iraq. They always bring with them, however, an instant, sobering realization of the hardships facing these poets, and other members of society, and the vast contrast with the Golden Age of the seventies generation. In size, these diwans are smaller than the palm of the hand, much different from the glossy publications of poets outside Iraq and away from the embargo. A quick turn of the pages reveals that poets have adapted their styles to accommodate the reduced space available to them: A poem might consist of four to six lines of two words each, none of the manuscripts of chapters and subsections we saw in the seventies generation.

One of these small-sized collections of poetry recently published in Baghdad entitled *al-Sh`ir al-`iraqi alan*²⁵ [Iraqi Poetry Now] contained the following introduction:

SPRING & FALL 2011

The style that poets are writing in now is special and newly created. It is different from any style or any former poetic experience. It is a style uninherited and unimported. Rather, they created it themselves in complete detail. The experience of these poets in the nineties is a new experience in all aspects, starting with the writing and ending with publishing books small in size with limited distribution and simple printing capabilities. Nobody else did this before at any time in the past.

Poets in Iraq are very much aware of the abnormal experience they are facing; particularly at the dawn of the 21st century with all its technological capabilities in printing and publishing. However, they are trying within these limits to make their special mark.

In looking at this collection containing twenty-seven poets, we can make several observations. The poetry is dominated by a similar style -- short, concentrated poems of astonishment, paradox, and irony. Poets write with courage and ability about topics and details previously thought unpoetic, offering random reports on daily life.

We offer four examples of these poems written by three different poets, the first two taken from the abovementioned collection. Whereas with other generations we chose poets to represent a range of styles, here we present three examples to emphasize the homogeneity of the generation. Because of the similarity, we give only the names of the poets with their poems without describing each in detail.

JAMAL ALI AL-HALAQ

FAMILY CRAZINESS

1) Let roses fall
on the graves of my loved ones
very much alive
Bushra
and her sons

2) Always
you come out of the frame

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as a different painting

3) Put the masks on our children
close all the windows
all the streets
all the cities
For air
is coming

جنون العائلة

1/ فليسقط الورد
على قبور أحبتي
الأحياء جدا
بشرى
وأبنائها

2/ دائما
تخرجين من الأمطار
كلوحة أخرى

3/ ألبسي أبناعنا الكمامات

أغلقي كل النوافذ
كل الشوارع
كل المدن
فالهواء قادم!

ABDUL `AMIR JARAS

DECEIVED MINUTES

I'm practicing my life ...
as if it is: a hobby
or a fantasy
I was never serious
In 1995, I entered the 30s
just like that ..

as if I entered . .
a bar!

NAPOLEON

Oh, God . .
What if you had corrected the situation
and produced from the emperor
a different man
a man
who does not prefer wars
to classrooms!

دقائق معشوشة

انني أمارس حياتي...
على أنها: هواية
أو نزوة
لم أكن قط جادا
في عام 5991، دخلت الثلاثين
هكذا..
أي كما لو انني أدخل..
حانة!

نابليون

الهي...
لو تداركت الموقف
وصنعت من الامبراطور
رجلا آخر
رجلا
لا يفضل الحروب
على قاعات الدرس!

NAJAT ABDALLAH

SEVEN SHADOWS . . . RELEASING THEIR BIRDS

1) Yes . . I'm here!
The number is correct . . but I'm wrong!
Name the telephone "heart";

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and my fingers white sails,
requesting you inattentively!
2) Yesterday . . the water's pipe died
Today . . time has married
and tomorrow . . I will lose the bus driver!
3) You are rising . . and the sea pirates,
but they are not the whole truth!
4) One paper
was enough
to make poles forget that they're standing!
[. .]

سبعة ظلال.. تطلق طائرها

1/ نعم.. أنا هنا
الرقم صحيح.. لكنني خطأ!!
سم الهاتف قلبا؛
فأصابعي أشرعة بيض،
تطلبك سهوا!
2/ بالأمس.. مات غليون الماء
واليوم.. تزوج الوقت
وغدا.. سأقصد سائق الحافلة!
3/ أنت تملو.. وقراصة البحر..
لكنهم ليسوا كل الحقيقة!
4/ ورقة واحدة،
كانت تكفي،

لتنسى الأعمدة انها واقفة!
[...]

The similarity in styles of the nineties generation of poets is not surprising. They began with the same base -- the war with Iran, a base they also shared with the eighties generation -- and now live together under the conditions of the embargo and the country's isolation. They write from the same source of suffering, with limited access to outside influences to offer alternative styles. The common desire to establish a new generation and demonstrate its uniqueness also unites poets. While the situation may look different to the poets themselves, it is currently their homogeneity that is the most striking.

CONCLUSION

In this essay, we have looked at fifty years of poetry in Iraq in order to trace not only the free verse movement but also the accompanying vision of *mughayara*, or efforts to break with the others. Three topics stand out: 1) *mughayara* has roots in the Arab heritage; 2) *mughayara* has led to specific changes in Arabic poetry's form and content; and 3) political, and at times economic and social, circumstances influence poets' efforts at change. Each of these topics will be reviewed in turn.

The idea of *mughayara* is not something new created by the free verse movement that began in Iraq in 1947. While poets did not use the term to define their efforts, attempts at innovation can be found as early as the Abbasid period. At this time, people from non-Arab Muslim countries brought their ideas and cultures to Arab society, as did translations from Greek, Indian, and Persian texts. As a result of this mixing and the prosperous times, poets and others called for changes in the traditional. For example, Abu Nawas attacked the traditional opening of a poem, "*al-muqadima al-talaliyya*" ["introduction about ruins"], saying such long descriptions preceding the main topic of a poem were unnecessary. In addition, Abu al-Atahiyah created new meters in poetry.

Innovations in Arabic poetry occurred in later periods as well. During the Arab conquest of Andalusia, the contact with the different environment produced a new style of poetry, "*al-muwashshahat*." In more recent times, the immigrant poets [*al-shu'ara al-mahjar*] drew on their experience in America to make several changes in the form of Arabic poetry. Concurrently, the Apollo group and *diwan* group in Egypt added their changes as well. A full exploration of the roots of *mughayara* deserves its own essay. Here, I only mention these highlights and remind the reader that Louis Awad, Nazik al-Malaika, and Abdul Hadi Mahbooba all recognized the link between the new poetry and earlier innovations.

The many examples of poems throughout this essay and discussion of each generation's additions show that efforts at breaking with others have led to specific changes in the form and content of Arabic poetry. For example, in their attempt to break with the constraints of traditional poetry, Badr Shakir al-Sayyab

and Abd al-Wahab al-Bayyati kept the idea of clear rhymes but used a variety of them in one poem and in a random order. They also randomized metrical patterns. Gradually, over the decades, the rhyme became more obscure and mainly disappeared. For example, although the poem by Khazal al-Majidi of the seventies generation has rhymes, one cannot easily recognize them. And in the eighties generation, in a new function, Abdul Razzaq al-Rub`ai used a rhyme to signal the end of a stanza. For the nineties generation, there are no meters or rhymes.

Regarding content, we have seen changes, for example, in poets' use of details from everyday life. In the late 1950s, Sa`adi Yusuf began the style of the everyday, removing the heavy symbols and historical references of the pioneers. In the 1970s, Hashim Shafiq, for one, added philosophical commentary to the concrete details. In the 1990s, concrete details include personal details. So, Abdul Amir tells us in a poem that he turned thirty in 1995. The filter that may have previously inhibited poets has been removed and all details are now permissible in a poem.

This last point, of what is permissible in a poem, brings up an important observation about *mughayara*. Along with each generation's efforts at change come reactions to these changes by other generations and individuals. People react out of their perceptions of what poetry is or should be. In the late 1950s, when the *Sh`ir* group called for liberating the poem and the imagination from all constraints like rhymes and meters, the immediate reaction of the pioneer of the modern poetry movement, Nazik al-Malaika, was to set rules and boundaries on what was acceptable poetry with its acceptable rhymes and meters.

As we have seen throughout this essay, political events in each decade have influenced the tools, styles, and visions poets use to deal with the circumstances. *Mughayara* is connected to poets' reality. In the late 1940s and 1950s, the desire to break with tradition occurred alongside campaigns for a modern, free state. In the 1960s, the chaos in Iraq pushed poets to create alternative realities in which to settle -- those of childhood memories, Marxist ideology, and surrealism. In the 1970s, the prosperity and opportunities in the country allowed poets to experiment and fly; in the later part of the decade, however, many Communist poets left the country and then incorporated

longing for homeland into their poems. The 1980s were dominated by the Iraq-Iran war. Poets had to create tools to survive the various fronts: the war itself, their own stance on the war, and their fear of falling into the war's propaganda machine. The limitations of the embargo in the 1990s have led to direct, brief poems; poets do not have the space or resources to use mythology, detailed scenarios, or elaborate reflections.

This overview has traced one of the most important peaks in Arabic literature. The free verse movement and its versions of *mughayara* dramatically changed the way people thought about and wrote poetry. Now, at the dawn of the 21st century, is an appropriate time to reflect on the past fifty years of innovations and to ponder future ones. The Iraqi case is a good example with which to examine the development of modern Arabic poetry: It has recognizable efforts, changes, and unknown directions.

(Endnotes)

- 1 Louis Awad. *Blutoland(Plutoland)*, 2nd ed. (Cairo: al-Haya al-masriya al'amma li al-kuttub, 1989).
- 2 Nazik al-Malaika. *Al-'amal al-kamila (The Complete Works)*. Col. 2, 2nd ed. (Beirut: Dar al-'awda, 1979).
- 3 Nazik al-Malaika. *Qadaya al sh'ir al mu'assir (The Issues of Contemporary poetry)*, 5th ed. (Beirut: Dar al-'ilm, 1978).
- 4 Awad, *Plutoland*, 133. This and all other translations are my own.
- 5 Al-Malaika, *Issues*, 346.
- 6 *Ibid.*, 347
- 7 *Ibid.*, 347
- 8 *Ibid.*, 35
- 9 al-Malaika, *Complete Works*, 13.
- 10 Buland al-Haidari, *al-'amal al-kamila (The Complete Works)*, 2nd ed. (Beirut: Dar al-'awda, 1980), 56.
- 11 Badr Shakir al-Sayyab, *unshudat al-matar (The Rain Song)*, (Beirut: Maktabat al-hiyya, n.d.), 128-120.
- 12 *Qasa'id hubb min al-'iraq (Love poems from Iraq)*, (Cairo: Markaz al-hadara-al-'arabyya, 1996).
- 13 Sa'adi Yusuf, *al-'amal al-kamila(Complete Works)*(Baghdad: Dar al-Farabi, 1979).
- 14 Hassab al-Shaykh Jafar, *al-'amal al-kamila (Complete Works)*(Baghdad: Dar al-Hurriyya, 1979).
- 15 Sami Mahdi, *al-As'ila (Questions)*(Baghdad: Dar al-Rashid, 1979).
- 16 Fadhil al-Azzawi, *Rajil yarmi ahjaran fi bi'r(A Man Throwing stones in a well)*(London: Riad El Rayyes, 1990).
- 17 Khazal al-Majidi, *Anashid israfil (Israfil's Cantos)*(Baghdad: al-Shu'un al-thaqafiyya, 1984), 97.
- 18 Ra'ad Abdul Qadir, *Jarwa' iz al-sana al-kabisa(Prizes of the leap year)*

METAMORPHOSES

- (Baghdad: al-Shu`un al-thaqafiyya, 1995), 34.
- 19 Hashim Shafiq, ed., *Dakhil al-watan kharij al-manfa (Inside the Country, Outside the Exile)* (Aden: Dar al-Hamdani, 1984), 260.
- 20 Al-Mawjah al-Jadigah, 1986, Baghdad, Iraq.
- 21 Hurras al-Watan Magazine, Issue 387, July 1987, Baghdad, Iraq.
- 22 Assfar Issue 11/12, 1989, Baghdad, Iraq.
- 23 Siham Jabbar, *al-sh`ira (The Poet)* (Baghdad: Dar al-hurriyya 1995).
- 24 Abdul Razzaq al-Ruba`iy, *Ilhaqan bi al-maut al-sabiq (Connected to the Previous Death)* (Baghdad: Dar ashtar, 1986).
- 25 Faraj al-Hattab and Abbas al-Yusufi, eds., *al-Sh`ir al-Iraqi al'an (Iraqi Poetry Now)* (Baghdad, 1998).