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**A Speculative Poetics of Tammuz:
Myth, Sentiment, and Modernism in Twentieth Century Arabic Poetry**

Abstract

In this paper, I attempt to read the poetic principle behind the Tammuzi movement of modern Arabic poetry through the lens of speculative poetics. While speculative-poetic accounts of modern poetry, such as those provided by Allen Grossman, blazed new paths connecting poetry to personhood in modernity, their application to the development of modern poetry outside of Europe remains limited by their self-avowed focus on European history. This paper will outline a critical corrective to speculative poetics which, I argue, can be of value in extending its domain of application to Arabic projects of poetic modernity, particularly the two tendencies of "free verse" and "commitment" poetry that emerged out of the Tammuzi movement.

Keywords: Allen Grossman, Jabra Ibrahim Jabra, Modern Arabic Poetry, Tammuzi Poetry, speculative philosophy, free verse, *iltizam*, romanticism

"Poetry is older than skillfully elaborated prose speech. It is the original presentation of the truth, a knowing which does not yet separate the universal from its living existence in the individual [...] but which grasps the one only in and through the other."

G.W.F. Hegel (quoted by Grossman 2009, 114)

On the Uses and Abuses of History for Poetics

When Palestinian poet, literary theorist, novelist, and painter Jabra Ibrahim Jabra (1920-1994) left his home in Jerusalem for the last time in 1948, he carried with him a handwritten translation he'd been working on, intermittently, for some time (Jabra 1979, 9). The translation was of the first part of volume four of James Frazer's *The Golden Bough*, entitled "Adonis, Attis, Osiris," the section utilized by T. S. Eliot in *The Wasteland* (Frazer and Fraser 2009, xxxvii). No sooner had he arrived in Baghdad, where he would teach for some time, than the manuscript which will come to be entitled *Tammuz or Adonis* (Jabra 1979), in reference to the sacrificial Sumerian god-king of Life-in-Death (Graves 2013,

205, 308, 414 *et passim*) started to circulate among the Iraqi literati, especially the poets. One of those poets, Badr Shakir al-Sayyab (1926-1964), quickly became a lifelong friend and confidant of Jabra, one of the most significant Arabic poets of the twentieth century (Kadhim 2004, 140 *n.39*), and "founder of Arabic mythopoesis" (DeYoung 1998, 97, 73). The Kurdish Buland al-Haidari (1926-1996), spellbound by the myth, became another pioneer of "free verse" modernism (Jabra 1979, 11). Meanwhile, the Syrian Ali Ahmad Said (b. 1930) took up the pen-name "Adunis" in an "act of ideological initiation" (al-Musawi 15), himself becoming a chief figure and theoretician of "free verse" modernism. What may be called the "rival" strand of poetic modernism, so-called *iltizam* or political "commitment" poetry, developed under the sign of Tammuz as well, as witness one of its prime figures, the Iraqi Abdel-Wahhab al-Bayyati (1926-1999) (Al-Musawi 2006, 222), not to mention the mythographical poetry of his "committed" compatriot and friend, Shathel Taqa (1929-1974). The manuscript would not be published until about a decade later, first in Iraqi journals in 1954, then in book form in 1956 (Jabra 1979, 11). Significantly, its publication came largely in response to the forces it had *already* unleashed in Arabic poetry while passing from hand to hand (*ibid.*). Soon enough Jabra's own 1959 debut collection would bear the title *Tammuz in the City* (Jabra 1990, 15-94). By that time, the features of a "Tammuzi movement" could already be sufficiently discerned as to become the subject of study and sustained reflection, such as one finds in As'ad Razuq's seminal *Myth in Contemporary Poetry: The Tammuzi Poets* (1959), where he writes of the loosely affiliated group of iconoclastic Arabic poets as figuring a new mode of subjectivity, that of the urban but alienated city-dweller confronted by imperial transgression and the subservience of Arab regimes (cf. Said 2018, 16 ff.).

Tammuz may have stolen into Arabic poetics like a thief in broad daylight, but the ground had already been prepared for his arrival by some prior developments beginning, perhaps, with Gibran Khalil Gibran's (1883-1931) "visionary" poetics (Said 2018, 26, 38-9, 42). One significant event consisted in the introduction of T. S. Eliot's poetic theories to Arabic audiences in Egyptian Lewis Awad's 1946 article on Eliot's "mythic method" (DeYoung 2000, 5-6). How curious it is that the "reactionary poet T. S. Eliot," as al-Bayyati once called him (Al-Musawi 2006, 47; cf. Kadhim 2004, 137 *n. 29*), would be appropriated by a poetry emerging in the context of anti-colonial fervor and national liberation. But inquiry into the Tammuzi poem raises much more than the question of influence. The Tammuzi poem, as Muhsin al-Musawi reminds us, is an emblem of "the intricate workings of the creative mind" (2006, 218). How to approach it fundamentally as such an imaginative achievement?

In this paper I suggest that we begin to find a means for a fundamental examination of Tammuzi poetry as an imaginative creation in Allen Grossman's notion of "speculative

poetics," which seeks to examine the intermediation of poetic speech and political representation. To the proposed conjoining of *poesis* and *polis* Grossman brings neither the militancy of the *engagé* nor the lens of the psycho-biographer. Jeffrey Robinson, a student of Grossman, summarizes his standpoint well:

His view, that poetry seeks to conserve the image of the hero across time, has always seemed to me very compelling and moving. In that view we are all subject to the denial of access to the community, all falling away from its nurturance; the poem represents the fundamental counter-statement to oblivion and isolation. It represents commitment to the acknowledgement of the person by the community of civilization. [...] The issue is not precisely immortality but presence. (Robinson 1987, 69)

Already we can point to affinities that draw Grossman's poetics closer to our proposed reading of Tammuz's influence upon the modernism of Arabic poetry, for in his article from 1946 Lewis Awad had intimated that Eliot's breakthrough consisted in tracing the roots of English poetry not simply to Greek and Roman civilization, but "back to the basic elements (*usul*) of human civilization in general" (quoted in DeYoung 2000, 6). Further, it is exactly as a poem of "presence" in collective civilizational "acknowledgement" that Lebanese literary critic and historian Charbel Dagher sums up the thrust of Arabic modernism in the second half of the twentieth century (Dagher 2018, 367 ff.). Grossman, along the same lines, defines presence in terms of situatedness in history (Grossman and Halliday 1992, 351), for the image-ideal of personhood that the poem constructs is "the fiction which we undertake to affirm when we construct historical narratives to account for the meaning of poems" (ibid. 343). Based on a thoroughgoing examination of the archives, Dagher claims that although the common view that marks the birth of Arabic modernism, commonly associated with the development of "free verse," with the launch of the Beirut-based *Shi'r [Poetry]* magazine in 1957 is not mistaken, the development was underpinned by a sustained growth of poetic experience culminating especially in Jabra Ibrahim Jabra (Dagher 2018, 371). The critical period underlying the development of "free verse" modernism, then, as well as its sometimes-antithetical modernism of "commitment," is the decade or so after Jabra was driven out of Palestine in light of the *Nakba* or "Catastrophe" of 1948 with the manuscript of *Adonis or Tammuz* lodged inconspicuously among his belongings.

I would by no means be the first to remark that the "modernism" of Arabic poetry, which comes to its own after the Second World War, cannot be reduced to a question of metrical innovation as the label "free verse" might suggest. Another and equally modernist strand of post-WWII poetics can be found in the aforementioned poetry of "commitment." As we will see in the last section of this paper, one is hard pressed to identify what substantially differentiates the two strands of modernism on grounds of metrical innovation or political engagement, despite the substantially conflicting poetic orientations they manifest.

I claim that Grossman's speculative poetics can help untangle the two modernisms, not only in light of their common ancestry in Tammuzi poetry but, just as significantly, by eliciting the distinct stances each assumed toward the sentimental poetry of interwar Arabic romanticism, to which the Tammuzi poem was in many ways a response. As we will shortly see, Grossman's approach serves us especially well by detecting the self-disclosive function of the turn to sentiment beginning with English Renaissance lyricism and culminating in the poetry of nineteenth century English romanticism. "Free verse" and "commitment" modernism thus both emerge as responses to the poetry of private sentiment by utilizing the "mythic method." Tammuzi personification becomes the screen through which two distinct images of personhood are shaped in view of a standpoint on private experience. "Free verse" is the more hospitable to it, "commitment" rather disparaging. The "mythic reference," as Grossman put it, becomes "the substantiating image" of a new model of personhood (Grossman 2009, 322). Yet we cannot hope to trace any direct line between the English and Arabic poems of sentiment. Whatever light we may derive from Grossman's speculative poetics will have to be critically mediated, particularly with regard to its Anglo-centric premises, if it is to be fruitfully cast on the development of twentieth century Arabic modernism.

Roughly a third of what follows will lay out Grossman's theory, a third will outline its critique, and the final third is application to Tammuzi poetry, however programmatically. I will conclude by returning to Jabra's emphasis on romanticism.

An Epitome of Speculative Poetics

Allen Grossman distilled his insights on poetics, after a life of teaching and practice, in a work entitled *Summa Lyrica* (Grossman and Halliday 1992, 205-383). The *Summa* bears the subtitle: *A Primer of the Commonplaces in Speculative Poetics*. The lessons of this primer are worth outlining for several reasons. Grossman stands out among the American poets and critics of the second half of the twentieth century in presenting the poem as a site of knowing that may best be called gnoseological. Gnoseology contrasts with epistemology insofar as gnoseology is an inquiry not into the conditions of knowledge on the subjective pole of experience, but into the point of coincidence between the poles of subjectivity and objectivity. Gnoseology therefore may well be termed "onto-epistemology," where "the classical distinction between epistemology and ontology is replaced with the articulation of a [phenomenological and metaphysical] analysis" (Weber 2006, 119). It thus lends itself to process philosophies of all stripes that view the structure of polar oppositions, whether epistemic (subject/object) or ontological (finite/infinite), as transitional rather than

exclusionary (ibid.). The kind of knowing that Coleridge ascribes to "the primary Imagination," for example, is eminently gnoseological. Of which writes Coleridge:

The poet, described in ideal perfection, brings the whole soul of man into activity, with the subordination of its faculties to each other according to their relative worth and dignity. He diffuses a tone and spirit of unity that blends and (as it were) *fuses*, each into each, by that synthetic and magical power, to which we have exclusively appropriated the name of imagination. This power [...] reveals itself in the balance or reconciliation of opposite or discordant qualities: of sameness, with difference; of the general, with the concrete; the idea, with the image; the individual, with the old and familiar objects; a more than usual state of emotion with more than usual order; judgement ever awake and steady self-possession, with enthusiasm and feeling profound or vehement; and while it blends and harmonizes the natural and the artificial, still subordinates art to nature; the manner to the matter; and our admiration of the poet to our sympathy with the poetry. (Coleridge 1983, 16-17)

Gnoseology looks at imagination as a place of privilege where man and world attain intervisibility (Grossman and Halliday 1992, 270). Questions of gnoseology are thus inherently questions of personhood. Insofar as it seeks such a standpoint of "indifference," or identity of opposites, gnoseological inquiry is an eminently speculative endeavor (Guyer 2014, 87 ff.).

When engaging Grossman's speculative poetics, one cannot aim for more systematicity than proposed by the author. The limitations of Grossman's account will be addressed in time. Their critique will form the basis of our engagement with the Tammuzi poem and its modernist legacy. For now the elements of speculative poetics must be presented in a way that will allow us to pick up the thread later in the inquiry, specifically highlighting the intersection of myth, sentiment, and the construction of personhood that is particularly relevant to an engagement with the Tammuzi poem.

For Grossman the poem has an inherently mythographic function. It traces out the countenance of sovereign personhood, personhood that is un beholden to its limitation by utility and scarcity (Grossman and Halliday 1992, 254-256; cf. Bataille 1993, 197-211), at that place where crises of self-representation are most acute and as the means of last resort, when existence "has come to the end of its mastery by other means" (Grossman 2009, 116). Speculative poetics, in turn, becomes the theory of the poem as an imaginative artifact manifesting the *eidos* (image-ideal) of a sovereign personhood. Grossman defines it as "the science of constructing presence through the eidetic function of language" (Grossman and Halliday 1992, 231). All language fulfills some sort of "eidetic function" insofar as it represents. But poetry stands out as the singular instance of language in which the eidetic function is prior to all other functions (ibid., 229). The *eidos* uniquely portrayed by the poem is

"the countenance or shape of the person" (ibid., 233). The image of sovereign personhood is thus theorized by Grossman as poetically "archaic" (ibid., 221):

prior to any other image which we derive from a poem, prior to any *sense* which a poem makes for its reader, there is a more fundamental transmission, something more profound [...] and that is *the image of the person* that is encoded in the very language-matter of the poem itself. (ibid., 19)

The countenance that the poem makes visible is not an anatomical feature or empirical representation. Nor is it a depiction of this or that particular person – the author of the poem, for example. Rather the countenance presents a "spiritual relationship" binding persons in a given collective at a certain point in history (ibid., 360). Blake's Albion, diffused throughout his poetry, presents a sovereign countenance of this sort (cf. Raine 92-112). So does Tammuz (Razzuq 1959, 54). The poem comes to manifest a countenance through the fabrication of a voice (Grossman and Halliday 1992, 256). The voice is essentially enunciated: "the first announcement that a poem makes is the announcement [...] of the credible fact of a speaking voice which [...] has inside it the assurance of a particular personal presence" (ibid., 19). The eidetic function of the poem can thus be understood as the imaginal construction of a "paradigm which enables interhuman perception" (ibid., 274).

A word must be added here regarding the use of "imaginal" and "imaginative." The latter is better associated with the creative mental effort on part of an individual, without a doubt an indispensable element in any poetic utterance of import. "Imaginal," on the other hand, refers to that posited intermediary between private and perceptible that is the site of the play of imagination (Grossman and Halliday 1992, 273; Bloom 1998). I will use "imaginative" to highlight the activity on part of the imaginer, while "imaginal" will refer to the "realm" of imagination itself.

The voice contained in the poem is neither the author's nor the reader's, though it is a voice constructed in the act of reception (Grossman and Halliday 1992, 259). Thus the language of the poem is eminently personal and singular, though it is not on that account private. The poem lives in that dreamscape where "extremes meet," as Coleridge liked to repeat (Paglia 1990, 328; Grossman and Halliday 1992, 318). This is why Grossman describes the construction of a poem as the invention of an "Orphic machine," where the immediacy of "natural presence" dissolves into the presence of "the fictional I" (Grossman and Halliday 1992, 364). The poem affirms the imaginal as the foundation of human experience just as it affirms the person as the site of presence and intervisibility.

"Discourse about poetry," from this standpoint, "is displaced discourse about persons" (ibid., 235). A poem may have whatever theme as its subject-matter, but its unique function is the construction of the sovereign human countenance, the presentation of the

eidos of personhood, by means of the fabrication of a speaking "I". The poem thus offers a person to the world just as it accommodates the world to the presence of personhood:

The subject matter of poetry, whatever its means may be, however vast a net it throws over the world of objects, is always, in my view, the person. For poetry there is no sky which is different from the unknown inwardness of other selves, the knowledge of which will construct selves as persons. I see for poetry no possibility and, indeed, no need consistent with its nature or its purpose in the world to make any offering whatsoever toward a world which is not the person. (ibid., 64)

Personhood, as a gnoseological category, intermediates mind and world such that the reflection of the one into the other may be imaginally disclosed. Further, and as implied in referencing a *sovereign* personhood (but can personhood be otherwise?), the poem's "summon[ing] into visibility" endows that image of personhood which it manifests with "eidetic privilege" (ibid., 270). The poem stakes out an axiological (value-conferring) claim that endows it with a civilizational function. Making a certain countenance imaginally visible orients the mind toward the mode of being that is of greatest value (ibid., 309). Who, or what, stands for this mode of being? Despite the poem being "a version of the world accommodated to the horizon of a person," it is the god-in-man who presents the image of the privileged actor *par excellence* (ibid., 269). The sovereign presents the image of the god on earth. But which sovereign and which god? The poem manifests a mythical image of sovereignty as "the representation of privileged consciousness, the speech of kings" (ibid., 269). Specifically, it is the image of the sacrificial king, in whose mythic countenance the mind tries to locate the meaning and interest of its mortality, that the poem substantiates. Grossman refers to the quest of Gilgamesh as the earliest discernible instance of this theme (ibid., 369). A theme, unsurprisingly, that is at the core of the Tammuzi poem, as literary theorist and historian Khalida Said's study on the Tammuzi roots of poetic modernism, "Modernity or the Gilgamesh Complex," amply shows (Said 2018, 9-87).

What Grossman seems to have in mind regarding the mythography of sovereign countenance puts one in mind of the transition from "mimetic" to "mythic" culture theorized by anthropologist Merlin Donald. Particularly, Donald presents the construction of myth as an advanced and historically unprecedented form of integrative cognitive modeling. It is myth in particular, not representational capacity *tout court*, that marks the decisive shift of the species into "the earliest human cultures" (Donald 1991, 211):

The most elevated use of language in tribal societies is in the area of mythic invention – in the construction of conceptual 'models' of the human universe. Even in the most primitive human societies, where technology has remained essentially unchanged for tens of thousands of years, there are always myths of creation and death and stories that serve to encapsulate tribally held ideas of origin and world structure. Stories about

seminal events in history – attempts to construct a coherent image of the tribe and its relationship with the world – abound. These uses were not late developments, after language had proven itself in concrete practical applications; they were among the first. (ibid., 213)

In a comparable sense, Grossman writes of the poem as speaking with "the authority of a *prior* life" (Grossman and Halliday 1992, 220). Personhood, then, exceeds selfhood. The self, from the standpoint of personhood, is no more than the human animal, an anthropological precondition. The person, on the other hand, is an "anthropophanic" function of the self (ibid., 230), imaginably manifesting, and thus substantiating, the human countenance. Because it is not a function of self-reflection, personhood is a "fundamentally anti-psychological" category:

poetry has a destiny not in selves, but in persons; and [...] whereas selves are found or discovered, persons and personhood is an artifact, something that is *made*, an inscription upon the ontological snowfields of a world that is not itself human. (ibid., 19)

What distinguishes self from person is the latter's membership in a historical community. By these lights a "person" is an imaginative historical construction through which the self transcends the horizon of its finitude by way of membership in a collective, that is, by differentiating from nature and inhabiting the *polis*, Aristotelian "second nature" (ibid., 255). From the standpoint of the individual, personhood is not so much a marker of "selves" but of "the value of selves" (ibid., 20). The self is elevated to the subject of value as it takes on the sovereign countenance of personhood (ibid., 312). The concept of sovereignty, which Grossman discusses under the title of "majesty" (ibid., 255), is thus not far removed from the intimacy of the question of personhood.

Finally, though the person is essentially *persona*, the personal countenance is separated from the mask by an ineluctable distance. Whereas the mask denotes "the fiction of a face," the person denotes "the face known always to be a fiction" (ibid., 306). Such "use of the persona" corresponding to "the use of an *I*" is another abiding feature of Tammuzi poetry (Al-Musawi 2006, 32). The countenance, the privileged *eidōs*, denotes a form of *knowledge*: disclosure and not simply deception. The countenance not only constitutes the imaginal ground of interpersonal recognition, but likewise decisively mediates the relation between mind and world (Grossman 2009, 117). The history of the poetic person is imaginative in just the same way, then, that the history of the legal person may be described as imaginative, the history of a *persona ficta* (Grossman and Halliday 1992, 242). We are here coming upon the Viconian grounds of historical fabrication, both as "making" and "making-up" (ibid., 343; cf. Collingwood 1956, 63-71; Bloom 1976, 8). The ancient tablets of the law are also the oldest inscriptions of the poem. Both fabricate the person as "*persona ficta*" and manifest its value by means of the word (Grossman and Halliday 1992, 243). The

"archaism" of poetic personhood is thus also witness to the antinomy of ethical life (*ethos*) and law (*nomos*) which Gillian Rose identified as "modernity's ancient predicament" (Rose 1992, xii *et passim*).

All of this is to say that no matter how "irrevocably personal" or even "intuitive" (Grossman and Halliday 1992, 236), poetic knowledge remains equally a function of the collective and sustains the civilizational tension between individual and collective. The poem, after all, can only be authored in "the language of a collectivity, of a class" (*ibid.*):

Each poet chooses not the language of an individual but the language of a class – for reasons. Among these reasons are that the language of an individual has about it the mortality of an individual and the limited horizon of reference of an individual; whereas the language of a class has the immortality of a community and the extended horizon of reference of a community, and also, what is ever more important, inside it the sanctions and authenticity of a community derived from the same sources that make the world possible, for it is in a community that reality, as a whole, is produced – the up and the down as well as the local arrangements by which persons govern their lives." (*ibid.*, 85-6)

On this basis we may speak of speculative poetics as "the theory of how persons fit together in social formations" (Grossman 2009, 32). The sovereign countenance, seen as "spiritual relation" as intimated above, comes to manifest an abiding tension between private and collective. Like Rose, Grossman retrieves the theme of an abiding antinomy as the essence of current civilization (Grossman and Halliday 1992, 328; Grossman 2009, 167-168). Yet the antinomic character of European metropolitan civilization, particularly in England, is what Grossman is concerned with above all. His lens is restricted accordingly. We thus find Grossman positing the lyrical "I" as the generic instrument responsible for fulfilling the eidetic function of English poetry in the last 400 years, roughly since the English Reformation. He detects in the rise of lyrical poetry in England a new mode of poetic utterance. The new poem is born in the context of an emerging "eidetic crisis" (Grossman 2009, 116). The Anglican break with papal authority coincided with new poetic voices spreading throughout sixteenth century England. This is roughly the century bookended by Sir Thomas Wyatt on one end and William Shakespeare, on the other, opening on to the Metaphysical poetry of John Donne, more on which below. The rise of a new kind of poem was fundamentally tied to the emergence of a new ruling class under the banner of the Third Estate.

Grossman is by no means the first to note that the rise of the bourgeoisie marks the transition from "the politics of estates," that is, of feudal order, to "the politics of classes." The dominance of the "Third Estate" in England, his case-in-point, fell within the first wave of mass privatization of common land, the "enclosure of commons," from the fourteenth to

the seventeenth century. Another, more far-reaching mode of "privatization" was taking place poetically according to Grossman (Grossman and Halliday 1992, 312). In the transition to "the politics of classes" we witness the rise of the poem of private sentiment referred to by Grossman and many others as "the lyric." At this point we must pause to consider Grossman's historical presuppositions.

"The Liberational Paradoxes of the Lyric"

In one of his interviews, Grossman posits a sweeping history of poetic representation, the relevant parts of which are worth quoting at length:

Consider, as a Rousseauian heuristic history, the following narrative [...] that, though my analysis is briefly sketched, I intend to be both logically and historically valid (not in any case, in contradiction of fact) and that also I consider *to be present logically and historically inside every occasion of poetic representation*: Throughout the history of humankind — which in this view begins in the earliest moment at which we recognize the 'human' status of the animal (in the Viconian sense, the moment in which we 'make ourselves human') on the ground of the speciating distinction of language, long before the onset of speech — *'human beings' have been and still are creatures of highly developed mind, but very imperfectly developed means of control of the material world*. The most perfect means (indistinguishable from the self-recognition of the species) humankind has possessed in the last 500,000 years of its development (since *Homo habilis*) is 'language' — *the human instrument of most general application*. [...] By its nature as the constituting system of the human world (identified with fundamental species recognition), such prehistoric 'language' is now the always present substructure or environment (*Umwelt*) of human mind to which poetry gives access. [...] Hence poetic language — the collective memory of the prehistoric general tool — is invoked precisely at the edge of the human world where the human mind has come to the end of its mastery by other means. [...] [P]oetry is summoned at moments of eidetic crisis, to the reconstitution of that face that is obtained [...] by reason of speaking, because poetic language brings into the present the prehistoric language of the self-identification of the person. (Grossman 2009, 115-7)¹

Western poetry, for its part, is situated within this grand-historical narrative as a tendency beginning some 3,000 years ago (Grossman and Halliday 1992, x). Many have pointed out the pitfalls of drawing a direct lineage of "Western" – or for that matter, "Oriental" – literature from our present day to the ancient peoples of Greece, Canaan, or Mesopotamia. Yet what matters for us in the proposed genealogy is the way in which a cognitive-

¹ The Smithsonian's Human Origins Program now dates *Homo habilis* back to 2.4 to 1.4 million years ago ("Homo habilis").

anthropological history of civilization allows Grossman to identify the poem "among the instruments of civilization [...] authorizing the fundamental constitution of the human world" (Grossman 2009, 118). The poem of personal sentiment, which Grossman calls "lyrical" and retrieves on this-side of his extended timeline, is traced back to the eidetic crisis produced by the rise of the Third Estate in Europe broadly, England specifically. The lyric's place in history indicates its eidetic function. The poem Grossman denotes as "lyric" is a class phenomenon, representing "the medium of visibility of the class which, in the evolution of the older estates system, is called the third estate [...] the modern 'possessing' or 'middle' class, for whom the final transformation of *proprium* is the inner life, subjectivity" (Grossman and Halliday 1992, 270-271). The vehicle of manifesting that hitherto "socially anonymous (nonpractic) class" becomes private sentiment (ibid., 270). Significantly, the voice in the lyric is also a substantiation of a mythic countenance of personhood, betraying "the solitude of sovereignty" (ibid., 255). Private sentiment, as a site of personal substantiation, steals into the world under the cloak of lyricism. Sentiment is transformed into "a deed of presence [...] a model of self-representation" (ibid., 270). Lyricism becomes "the instrument of self-transcendence of those selves and aspects of selves which exist only as *pathos*, or sentiment" (ibid., 272). This poem of private sentiment introduces "a unique instrument in civilization for the representation of unrepresented aspects of the self, the nonsocial sector of human self-recognition, and the traditionally nonpractic classes in the polity (in particular the third estate)" (ibid.).

The rise of the poem of private sentiment and the rise of liberal middle-class culture are thus not only "obviously parallel in modern European history" (ibid., 272). Both phenomena emerge out of the same "dialectic of liberation" (ibid.). The dialectic of liberation from which "liberal and lyric culture" originate is one whereby "the conditions of the enjoyment of freedom by one class require the subordination of another class" (ibid.). In liberal culture, freedom is purchased at the price of economic privilege. Like many before him and since, Grossman points out "the noncongruence of economic and political privilege in liberal society," whereby "the politically 'equal' are not humanly equal as long as they are economically oppressed" (ibid., 273).

Thus there appears to be a deep conflict between the *eidos* of sovereign personhood and the image of an unrepresented *demos* or multitude (ibid., 274).² The imaginal crux of the contradiction between the rising poem of the middle class and the culture of the *Ancien*

² Perhaps this is why theoreticians of "the sovereign" tend to skew monarchical on the political spectrum, as witness Carl Schmitt and, to a lesser extent, Giorgio Agamben. But cf. Robert Yelle's provocative egalitarian rehabilitation of the concept (see Yelle 2019 and 2018). -- With thanks to the author for clarifying these points in personal correspondence.

Régime threatens to replicate itself in the conflict of the ascendant middle class with subordinate classes whose economic interest remains unrepresented (ibid., 348). Grossman singles out this "liberational paradox" as "the most important problem raised by the study of poetics" (ibid., 274) – to be precise, by speculative poetics.

The poem of sentiment struggles to bestow eidetic privilege on the image of personhood that becomes popularized with the rise of the middle classes in Europe (ibid., 271). But if eidetic privilege has been historically intertwined with the accumulation of wealth and domination (ibid., 273), such that the classical *eidōs* of personhood manifested by the poem is that of the sovereign, if not the god, and more often than not the sovereign *as* the god, then the question of eidetic privilege cannot be separated from its grounding in conquest and appropriation. Jacques Rancière is treading on kindred speculative grounds when he puts the question of the poem as follows: "what essential necessity links the modern stance of poetic utterance with that of political subjectivity?" (Rancière 2004, 9) His account of the "essential necessity" linking the rise of the politics of class with the rise of the modern poem, however, provides a critical rejoinder to Grossman's narrative.

The impact of the lyric is perhaps a commonplace in the narrative of European poetic modernity. But as Jacques Rancière points out, it is not clear – not as clear as Grossman suggests anyway – that the genre has a discernible prehistory (ibid., 10). Nonetheless, what is referred to in hindsight as the lyric has that distinctness of form which *should* grant it the status of a separate genre. Rancière suggests two parameters, which I will venture to call "eidetic," through which the features of the new "lyric" poem can be discerned with greater precision: "first the nature of the represented, second the method of utterance" (ibid.) – that is, the personhood represented and the method of its disclosure. Here Rancière is truer to the spirit of speculative poetics than Grossman, as he strictly considers the poem as "a model of self-representation" (Grossman and Halliday 1992, 270), sidestepping generic categories. Genres, after all, are little more than heuristic devices which can guide as much as mislead. Better to strike at the core of the speculative-poetic concern. The poem's eidetic function, fundamentally political in the strict sense, is encapsulated by Rancière in the following provocative terms:

the question of the status of the poem is not first of all a question of division into genres. The 'quality' of the poem is not defined by common genus and species differences. It depends on the encounter between a way of speaking – a way of positing or eliding the 'I' of the poet – and a way of representing, or not representing, people 'as they should be,' in the double sense of the expression: people who are as it is fitting they should be, and who are represented as it is fitting to represent them. [...] Poetry is an art of composing fables that represent characters and act upon characters. It thus belongs to a political experience [...]: to the relationship between the *nomoi* of the city – the laws that reign there, but also the songs that are sung – and the *ethos* of the

citizens – their character, but also their humor. Poetics is from the beginning political. (Rancière 2004, 11)

Once again, "modernity's ancient predicament," the antinomy of *ethos* and *nomos*, is brought to mind. From the standpoint of this antinomy we can come to understand the pride of place accorded to the lyric in the "invent[ed] genealogy" of modern European poetry, as Rancière puts it (*ibid.*). A prime exemplar of such deft invention of tradition is Grossman himself, who wields the fabricated lyrical prehistory to great illustrative effect. Yet even for Grossman, the history of the lyric is significant only insofar as it seeks to forge historical community by constructing a new *eidos* of personhood. Facilitating "interhuman perception" among the anonymous urban multitude remains the vocation of the new poem.

The new poem makes it possible to manifest a model of self-representation based on the political legitimation of private sentiment. So much can be discerned from Grossman's account. Rancière suggests not only that "this possibility has a name," but that the name is eminently identifiable, as we find it "uttered in the thirty-first of the eight thousand lines of William Wordsworth's *Prelude*: 'Dear Liberty,' an English poetic translation of the French political *Liberté chérie*" (Rancière 2004, 13).

Grossman has likewise detected in English romantic poetry, beginning with Blake, a further concentration of the eidetic function manifested in the lyric (Grossman and Halliday 1992, 271, 350; Grossman 2009, 52). Taking stock of Rancière's critique of the lyrical genealogy propels us beyond Grossman's restrictive reliance on the classical division of genres. Modernity in Arabic poetry, of course, did not pass through the developmental stages of the European poem (*cf.* Fakhreddine 2017). Rather the new Arabic poem of the second half of the twentieth century sought a new image of sovereign personhood in the welter of imperial conquest and colonial domination, on one hand, and the weakness and corruption of Arab regimes, on the other (DeYoung 2007). If eidetic privilege could not be disentangled from the conquest of wealth, as Grossman submits, then neither can its underlying vision of liberation. Only from the interested standpoint of the rising European middle classes could "the liberational paradoxes of the lyric" (Grossman and Halliday 1992, 273) be confined to gnoseological questions of access to the privacy of sentiment, that "hardness of being for another at precisely that place where the self is most accessible for the self, in the *topos* of the affections" (*ibid.*). Grossman, as we have seen, underscores the silencing of an unrepresented class as the price with which the eidetic privileging of the middle-class image of sovereign personhood is bought. In a similar vein, though in a different European context, Rancière points to the status of the silenced interest of the working class in Rimbaud's poetry (Rancière 2004, 41-69). Since movements of national liberation have decisively determined the development of modern Arabic poetry, what needs to be highlighted is not only the way in which the rise of the politics of classes was inextricable from the rise

of the nation-state in Europe. It is equally significant to highlight that both phenomena are inseparable from the onslaught of empire – and by no means against the better judgment of the metropolitan liberal intelligentsia. As Dipesh Chakrabarty remarks, "one of the ironies of history [is] that the British became political liberals at home at the same time that they became imperialists abroad" (Chakrabarty 2002, 85). Grossman's "liberational paradox" extends far beyond the shores of liberal Europe, though the European metropolis may have been the launching pad of that paradox upon the globe in recent history.

The Tammuzi poem is, to a significant degree, one of the unintended consequences of this "liberational paradox." A speculative poetics of the Tammuzi poem may finally be outlined from this standpoint, however programmatically. Speculative poetics will better illuminate the trajectory of modern Arabic poetry the more rigorously we pursue the global footprint of *Liberté chérie*, which first arrived on Arabic-speaking shores in colonial uniform. It remains to be said that the history of "imperial subjectivity," as Moroccan philosopher Fat'hi al-Miskini puts it (Al-Miskini 2005, 143, 149), is not a history of mere victimhood. No history can be simply reduced to an effect of conquest, no matter how crushing what Edward Said has aptly termed "the fact of empire" (Said 2014, 14; 2017 *passim*; cf. Ahmad 2008, 103).

Children of Tammuz

Moroccan poet and literary theorist Muhammad Bennis observe that a poem of private sentiment was largely what came to be identified with "Arabic romanticism" (Bennis 2008, 11-13; cf. Badawi 1992, 204 ff.). But the search for a parallel poem of sentiment is not the way to recover what is of genuine import in modern Arabic poetry (Fakhreddine 2017). As M. M. Badawi remarks, sentimental romanticism "reached its momentum between the two world wars" and "was on the wane immediately after the Second World War" (Badawi 1992, 204). This brand of poetry was ultimately condemned as out of step with "the traumatic changes" that overtook Arab lands after the Second World War (*ibid.*), whether in the form of direct settler colonialism (as in Israel and the French occupation of Algeria) or the "veiled" colonialism of client regimes (Kadhim 2004, xi). National liberation was the order of the day. It is in the struggles of national liberation, not in the triumphant rise of a middle class, that we shall find the "liberational paradox" constitutive of the poem in Arabic.

Modernism in Arabic poetry was born in the transition from the "inter-imperialist rivalry" of the old global colonial regime to the imperial conflicts of the Cold War. Yet what we may term "modern" poetry, in contrast to "modernism," has always developed under the banners of alien domination, beginning with Napoleon's 1798 campaign in Egypt and the

French occupation of Algeria in 1830, and accelerating after the British occupation of Egypt (at the behest of the Khedive, no less) in 1882 to see the majority of Arab lands divided up between the British and the French (cf. Kadhim 2004, vii ff.).

Different poetic stances have had to contend with different forms of political domination of Arab lands throughout the twentieth century. Pathbreakers of Arabic modernism such as Gibran Khalil Gibran (1883-1931) and Amin al-Rihani (1876-1940) experimented with "the poem in prose," attacked the sentimentalism of the Arabic romantics, and broke with traditional metrical modes (cf. Said 2018, 91-117; Dagher 2015, 13-68; Badawi 1992, 207; DeYoung 2004). "Modernism" in Arabic poetry is generally used to refer to "free verse" poetry. But it must be remembered that "free verse" refers to two distinct poetic developments. The first genuine sign of "modernism" is widely acknowledged to be the invention of *tafīla* poetry somewhere in the late forties by two Iraqi poets, Nazik al-Malaika (1923-2007) and Badr Shakir al-Sayyab (cf. al-Musawi 2006, 11), the latter being perhaps the most iconic of the Tammuzi pioneers, as mentioned in the introduction. The *tafīla* poets advocated an unprecedented break with traditional meters by introducing into Arabic a poem that was neither metered nor rhymed, though it preserved the traditional feet (*tafīlat*, s. *tafīla*). Yet "free verse" is also used to refer to the poetry that rendered that last link to traditional prosody, the *tafīla*, non-binding. On that account, it earned the dubious honorific (in addition to "free verse") of "prose poem" (Fakhreddine 2016; Creswell 2019, 121 ff.). It does not make matters any clearer to realize that Arabic poetic modernism may in fact be viewed as twofold.

What led to the development of "free verse" modernism does not lie so much in its various rebellions against metrical constraints (Fakhreddine 2017b, 40-41), nor strictly in the stance of resistance to imperial overreach. Anti-colonial poetry of the latter kind had appeared before and after the Tammuzi intervention, outside its circle of influence and within, breaking with traditional prosody in some instances and adhering to it in others, as Hussein Kadhim shows in his commanding study of the *Poetics of Anti-Colonialism in the Arabic Qasidah* (Kadhim 2004). No doubt such engaged poetry, especially as it rallies around the poetics of "*al-adab al-multazim*" or "*adab al-iltizam*" (committed literature), as announced by Suheil Idris in the inaugural issue of the literary review *Al-Adaab* in 1953, may be described as a "modernist" mode of Arabic poetry (Badawi 1992, 207; cf. Di-Capua 2018, 77-107).³ Are there any grounds to distinguish the two strands of modernism that unfolded out of the Tammuzi poem?

³ It is in fact Taha Hussein who coined the term "*iltizam*" in articles published in 1946 and 1947 in *Al-Katib al-Misri*, which he edited. -- My thanks to Adey Almohsen for clarifying this point to me in a personal correspondence.

We have come upon an irksome problem in the study of modern Arabic poetics, the significance of which extends far beyond the semantic surface. The poetry of "commitment" (*iltizam*) is generally contrasted with "free verse." Both are acknowledged, as heirs of the *taf'ila* revolution, to be "modernist" forms of poetry. Yet the former ("commitment") denotes a stance toward political struggle, while the latter ("free verse") is taken to refer to an innovation in prosody. For its part, it is not difficult to detect a discernible political commitment in "free verse" poets as well (Badawi 1992, 209). On the other hand, the "committed" poets of the fifties and sixties have also tended to write poems in free verse. Both, to muddle things even further, emerged out of the same Tammuzi movement of the forties and early fifties to represent what ultimately became rival poetic projects. The polarization comes to a head in the conflicting trajectories of two major Beirut-based literary organs, *Shi'r* (1957-1970) and *al-Adaab* (1953-2013) (Creswell 2019, 52 ff.). Thus far from disintegrating, the Tammuzi poem differentiated into two rival tendencies as the method of mythographic self-representation it brought to the table became the contested ground of a deep polarization on fundamentally speculative grounds. The difference between the two modernisms of "commitment" and "free verse" cannot be satisfactorily determined by restricting the inquiry to problems of prosody and political commitment, nor to the varying fates of their respective organs (*Shi'r* and *al-Adaab*), however influential. This is not to deny that we can make generally accurate classifications, such that of "commitment" poets as aligning with pan-Arabism and occasionally Soviet communism and "free verse" poets as embracing a broadly "ecumenical humanism" (Creswell 2019, 43). Yet even this ground of distinction is built on a deeper engagement of both with the plights of colonialism and national liberation, not to speak of the fact that both "committed" and "free verse" poets identified with the left and advocated broadly socialist ideals (*ibid.*). One has to delve deeper and engage the two modernist poetic voices on grounds of their underlying eidetic functions, that is, of the "liberational paradox" that the poem uniquely manifests in each, and what it says about their underlying image-ideal of personhood.

A poet of commitment such as al-Bayyati puts one in mind of the eidetic function of the poem when he writes of the various "masks" he sought in mythical voices as representing "the name through which the poet speaks divested, as it were, of his own subjectivity" (quoted in Badawi 1992, 214). His Tammuzi personae span the gamut of pre-Islamic and classical Arab poets (Tarafa ibn al-'Abd, al-Mutanabbi, al-Ma'arri, to name a few), Arab and non-Arab sufis (Hallaj, Omar Khayyam), historical and dramatic figures (Alexander the Great, Hamlet), and European poets (Lorca, Machado). Neither did his erstwhile "free verse" rivals disown their Tammuzi inheritance. Yusuf al-Khal, the founder of *Shi'r*, will turn Ezra Pound himself into a figure of civilizational revival (Fakhreddine 2017b, 41-2), a Tammuzi persona, not to speak of Adunis's usage of historical figures such as Mihyar of

Damascus and mythical ones such as the Phoenix (ibid. 42-43), Sayyab's countless Tammuzi figures, notably Christ, and Jabra's own Tammuz, to mention only a few representative instances.

What is it that drives apart these two children of Tammuz at the level of eidetic function? In the poetry of "commitment," such as that of al-Bayyati, the mythographic imagery tends to enlist the poem in service of "an overtly political agenda" (Kadhim 2004, 175). It must be said that al-Bayyati's overt politicization of the poem is not carried out with the intent to stamp out the artistic element (Al-Musawi 2006, 33). But what is of fundamental significance in all cases is not the subordination of poetry to praxis, but the diremption of the two which sanctions it. Such diremption is so uncharacteristic of "free verse" modernism that the tendency to fuse poetry and praxis may be declared its abiding mark. It is here that a continuity finally suggests itself between the modernism of "lyric" detected by Grossman in the poetry of the English Renaissance and (later on) of English romanticism, on one hand, and the "free verse" and "commitment" modernisms of Arabic poetry coming out of the Tammuzi cloak, on the other. Rigorously, at the level of eidetic function, Arabic "free verse" modernism is a stance on the sentimentalism of interwar Arabic romanticism by mediation of "the mythic method" of the Tammuzi movement. This standpoint on sentiment is what grounds its fundamental difference from the other child of Tammuz, the poetry of "commitment."

The differentiation can be articulated as follows. The turn to private sentiment of early Arabic romanticism, denounced as "escapist" (Badawi 1992, 204) and "petit bourgeois" (ibid., 210), was overturned by the poetry of "commitment" in favor of expressing political programs of liberation. This is what lends the poem of "commitment" its "tendency to objectify experience" and even seek "a demythologized vision of struggle and contest," while explaining at the same time its lasting indebtedness to Tammuzi personification, even though it may devolve in this context into more of a "poetic pastiche" (cf. al-Musawi 2006, 223).

On the other pole, Terri DeYoung's comparative study of Adunis and John Donne reveals how sentiment fared in "free verse" modernism. We shall recall what T. S. Eliot wrote of Donne as representative of the tendency to use sentiment as a window on metaphysical disclosure (Eliot 1921). As far as Adunis is concerned, DeYoung reminds us that "Few poets have been more consistently identified with the 'private mode' in modern Arabic poetry than Adunis" (DeYoung 1994, 2). Commenting on the role of private sentiment in both Adunis and Donne, DeYoung perceptively adds:

Their [i.e., Donne and Adunis] desire is not so much to turn their backs upon the world, as it is to perfect their private vision to the point where its universal validity will be recognized by all. This attitude they share with another group of poets with

whom Adunis has certain kinship, the Romantics. They, too, felt the urgent need to communicate a private vision to a resistant public and they often viewed themselves, as Adunis frequently does, in the context of the self-sacrificing hero. (ibid., 14)

The statement confirms Grossman's linking of the eidetic function of lyric and romantic poetry and pulls "free verse" Arabic modernism into that orbit. In "free verse" modernism, but not its "commitment" counterpart, the poem is affirmed first and foremost as a unique source of knowing arrived at not by "negotiating" against private sentiment but by affirming it.

In her study on "free verse" modernism at large, both in its restricted (*tafila*) and unrestricted modes, Huda Fakhreddine analyzes this tendency to view the poem as a model of self-representation under the rubric of "metapoesis," that is, "poetry about poetry" which is used as a vehicle of self-understanding in view of an impersonal, not to say alienating, heritage (Fakhreddine 2015). She makes the case convincingly for metapoesis being an abiding theme of "modernisms" old and new, as she demonstrates by comparing the *mudathun* (modernist or modernizing) poets of the Abbasid era with the post-WWII modernism of "free verse." Yet Fakhreddine's insights on the metapoetic function of modernism forces some questions upon us with regard to the significance of the poetry of sentiment in the context of twentieth century Arabic modernism. While metapoesis highlights the continuity between ninth and twentieth century modernisms, one wonders if there is anything that distinguishes twentieth century modernism not in spite but *in virtue* of its mediation with certain strands of poetic development in Europe. Elsewhere Fakhreddine points out the error of reducing modernist Arabic poetry to any one of its many historical influences, whether Arabic or Anglo-European (Fakhreddine 2017). But our foregoing inquiry suggests that the poetry of sentiment played a fundamental role in the emergence of Arabic as well as Anglo-European modernism, whether through tending to its negation as a source of genuine knowledge in the poem of "commitment" or its affirmation as such in "free verse" modernism. The issue here is subtle but, I claim, highly significant. On one hand, there is the crass imitation of romantic sentimentalism rightly criticized by Mohammed Bennis (Bennis 2008, 14). On the other hand, and if the foregoing inquiry is any indication, one must contend with the formative influence of European sentimentalism on twentieth century Arabic poetic modernism by mediation of Tammuzi poetics. Grossman reveals that the poem of private sentiment comes to a head in the visionary romanticism of figures such as Blake and other romantics. The latter connection seems to be, by and large, under-studied in literature on Arabic modernism, though emphasized by the two major introducers of "the mythic method" into Arabic poetry, namely, Louis Awadh and, most sustainedly, Jabra Ibrahim Jabra.

Coda: Tammuz in the City

A third and more recent notable exception is the aforementioned Mohammed Bennis. If Arabic romanticism was associated with bald sentimentalism, it was because the insights of German romanticism, "the first [or paleo-] romanticism," as Mohammed Bennis calls it, were all but absent from its self-definition (Bennis 2008, 12-25). One notes that while Adunis may be considered the "*poeta doctus*" of Arabic "free verse" modernism (Creswell 2019, 56), it is Jabra Ibrahim Jabra who reveals what is distinctly romantic about that modernism.

It may be deemed odd to read Jabra Ibrahim Jabra as a poet rather than a novelist. The first to agree would be Jabra himself, who points out the potential weaknesses of his own poetry in the very opening of his seminal 1959 collection, *Tammuz in the City* (Jabra 1990, 15). What literary critic Issa Boullata, who was Jabra's fellow Jerusalemite friend and confidant, said about the vibrancy of Jabra's English poetry (Boullata 2002, 51) cannot be applied with equal confidence to the poetry he wrote in his native Arabic. Nevertheless, Jabra's romantic intervention in the 1940s and 1950s distilled the essence of a movement that permanently transformed the countenance of Arabic poetry (Boullata 2002, 57; Dagher 2018, 371). Jabra's contribution, however, will have to be left for a future inquiry.

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