

Engaging T.S. Eliot's City Narratives in The Poetry Badr Shaker Al-Sayyab

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Abstract

The paper critically examines the city/country narratives in the poetry of the Iraqi poet, Badr Shaker Al-Sayyab and T.S. Eliot in order to explore the Arab poet's attempt to integrate western modernism into the Arabic poetic canon. The paper argues that in Al-Sayyab's poetry, Eliot's urban modernism is appropriated to articulate social and political issues integral to the Arab world in the post WW II era. Unlike poets who reconstruct western texts in order to dismantle them, Al-Sayyab transforms Eliot's city narratives into a poetics of protest to confront national predicaments and challenge local tyrannical regimes, the heirs of the colonial legacy. Such a process of adaptation which includes recollection, intertextuality, rephrasing and re-writing of western legacies to fulfill indigenous purposes, is part of the issue of hybridity and interculturalization which characterizes the contemporary experience of political and cultural globalization.

Key Words: *hybridity, city/country dialectics, western narratives, Arab modernism.*

Introduction

Challenging the hegemony of the ruling regimes in his own country during the post WWII era and establishing an analogy between Eliot's wasteland and a stagnant Arab world, the Iraqi poet, Al-Sayyab¹, functionalizes western traditions and motifs, assimilated from Eliot, to articulate local discourses and national crises. In other words, in Al-Sayyab's poetry, Eliot's western narratives and poetic techniques are recycled, disseminated and developed in the form of a poetic construct probing socio-political issues of great ramifications on the national and regional levels in the post WWII era. Appropriating Eliot's poetry to be used in a different language and within a different cultural context, Al-Sayyab aims to develop a hybrid poetics able to confront the new transformations in the Middle East. Through trans-cultural entanglement and textual appropriation of western narratives, Al-Sayyab provides diversity and insight into Arabic poetry intensifying the awareness of other traditions and reconstructing his own cultural heritage.

Engaging western traditions, Al-Sayyab not only appropriates Eliot's wasteland narratives but also the city / country dialectics integral to Eliot's modernism. In other words, Al-Sayyab incorporates Eliot's concept of the modern city transforming it into a poetic construct to confront the tyranny of the military regimes dominating the capital cities of the Arab world in the post war era. While Eliot's hostility toward the modern city is associated with the failure of the moral codes of a post-industrial civilization which disrupted the relationship between man and God, Al-Sayyab links the Arab city with tyrannical constructs, military establishments and other forms of repressive institutions erected by Arab regimes to subjugate people and confiscate human rights and democracy. In Al-Sayyab's poetry, Eliot's concept of the city as an inferno, characterized by darkness, ugliness, sin and ennui, is

transformed into a mechanism to express the Arab poet's indictment of an entire era. In poems such as "City of Sinbad", "Jaikur and the City", "City without Rain" and others, Eliot's concept of the modern city as a wasteland as well as his western myths and narratives are recycled to fit the Arab cultural context and the political situation in Iraq during the post war era. While Eliot finds salvation in Christianity and genuine moral traditions, Al-Sayyab argues that the only solution for the problems in the Arab world is the eradication of an entire order, a fossilized culture and an evil web of tyrannical regimes, the heirs of the colonial legacy who pulled the entire region backward toward the stone age.

Incorporating western narratives, conflated with the city motifs and adapted from Eliot's literary heritage, Al-Sayyab develops a revolutionary dynamics articulating his vision of a world on the verge of an inevitable collapse. While Eliot, in *The Waste Land*, draws an analogy between the grandeur of London in the Elizabethan era and the squalor of the city in modern times in order to condemn contemporary life, Al-Sayyab juxtaposes the beauty of Jaikur, the poet's own village and the ugliness of Baghdad. Salma Jayyusi discusses the impact of Eliot's concept of the city on Al-Sayyab's poetry stating that "Jaikur is an archetypal image of lost innocence and happiness". The influence of Eliot's "unreal city" in "The Waste Land" is seen in Al-Sayyab's hatred of the city, though it served only to emphasize what the poet authentically felt about city life. It must be remembered that Arab villages had already awakened to life and Al-Sayyab felt the difficulty of life and dehumanization in the city" (Jayyusi 1977:727). Thus, in Al-Sayyab's poetry the vile city which harbors the Iraqi regime and its repressive apparatuses is replication of Eliot's sinful city dominated by debauchery and corruption. In Eliot's *The Waste Land*, salvation becomes possible only after the collapse of the cities of sin, the "falling towers" of western civilization whereas, in Al-Sayyab's poetry, redemption is attainable through the eradication of totalizing political regimes that turned Iraq and the Arab world into a web of prisons and graveyards. Unlike Eliot's vision where salvation is pursued through Christian rituals, Al-Sayyab points out that redemption for the entire region could only be realized through armed revolution and blood sacrifices due to the brutality of the ruling regimes.

Being convinced of the hostility of the modern metropolis, Al-Sayyab transforms Eliot's urban modernism into a poetic mechanism denouncing life in Baghdad and the capital cities of the Arab world and expressing nostalgia for his own village, Jaikur, a symbol of purity and innocence. Discussing the tension between country and city in Arabic and English poetry, Terri DeYoung argues that Arab poets, in the post WW II era, were drawn to Eliot's urban poetry because, it "set itself against an agrarian and romantic tradition of English and American verse that have idealized the countryside and made it the focus of the poet's meditations" (DeYoung 2000: 6). Like other modernist Arab poets, from different ideological backgrounds, Al-Sayyab attempts to develop a new poetics to address the aspirations of the Arab people in the aftermath of the major transformations overwhelming the region in the post WW II era. Al-Sayyab was attracted to Eliot's urban poetry seeking refuge in western urbanism and associating the Arab world with Eliot's wasteland:

This urbanism compared well with the post-World War II situation in the Arab world where a trend toward migration into the cities had accelerated and became an issue of especial concern among those who expressed alarm over social dislocation and exacerbated misdistribution of wealth which they saw as resulting from this situation (DeYoung 2000: 6).

Unequivocally, Al-Sayyab takes pains to create a balance between the opposing forces originated in the modernist concept of the metropolis particularly the opposition between country (village) and city. In several poems, the poet reveals a desire to escape from Baghdad, the vile city toward Jaikur, his Jerusalem. Denouncing Baghdad as an exceptionally immoral city, the poet recalls Jaikur in order to escape from the tyranny of the city and its webs of evils. Due to his deep-seated love for Jaikur, the poet castigates Baghdad depicting it as a modern Babel whose citizens are cursed with disease and sin. Like Eliot's unreal cities, in *The Waste Land*, Baghdad, in Al-Sayyab's poetry, becomes a symbol of corruption, tyranny, and deception.

The Sinful City Motif in Eliot's Modernist Poetry

In Eliot's universal poem, *The Waste Land*, the city is delineated as a habitat of corruption and hypocrisy; therefore, the poet keeps himself distanced from its evil by using a variety of poetic techniques such as masks, allusions and objective correlatives. Being convinced that the modernization of the western city came at the expense of its traditions and moral values, Eliot laments the neglected churches of London: "Flowed up the hill and down King William Street / to where Saint Mary Woolnoth kept the hours / with a dead sound on the final stroke of nine" (Eliot 1973: 236). Denouncing a city where the church lost its function as a religious institution, Eliot, in a note expresses his resentment of what happened to the churches of London:

To one who, like the present writer, passes his days in this city of London the loss of these towers, to meet the eye down a grimy lane, and of these empty naives, to receive the solitary visitor at noon from the dust and tumult of Lombard Street, will be irreparable (cited in Howarth 1965, 223).

Eliot's perception that those who are totally devoted to build the industrial city have no time to build the church gives expression to the belief that the modern city has turned into an inferno. Therefore, in Eliot's city, human relationship diminish and life is depicted through the fearful image of the robotic masses flowing over London Bridge: "Unreal City / under the brown fog of a winter dawn/A crowd flowed over London Bridge, so many / I had not thought death had undone so many / sighs, short and infrequent, were exhaled / and each man fixed his eyes before his feet" (Eliot 1973: 236). According to the preceding passage, Eliot's city is a world dominated by war and death, and governed by chaos and fear.

The reference to death and decay in the above cited lines is part of the pessimistic atmosphere of "The Burial of the Dead", the first section of *The Waste Land*, which alludes to the ritual of burial integral to Christian traditions. In Eliot's poem, the city dwellers prefer to live buried in sin as if in daily ritual than die and be buried in a respectable way: "winter kept us warm, covering/ earth in forgetful snow / summer surprised us" (Eliot 1973: 235). Thus, Eliot's city of the dead harbors homeless and dispossessed aliens who constitute a variety of ethnological chaos including the Russian, the Lithuanian, the German, the Turkish "Mr. Eugenides, the Smyrna merchant", the Phoenician sailor, the displaced lover in the Hyacinth garden, Tiresias, the Theben prophet, Ferdinand of Naples, the British war veteran, Albert and the WWI soldier, Stetson: "There I saw one I knew, and stopped him crying: Stetson/ you who were with me in the ships at Mylae!" (Eliot 1973: 236). Obviously, Eliot's city is largely populated by displaced persons lacking to genuine traditions and moral values, therefore, it is

dominated by feelings of death indicated in the opening lines of *The Waste Land*: "April is the cruellest month breeding / Lilacs out of the dead land" (235).

Eliot's city is not only characterized by an atmosphere of death, hypocrisy and corruption but also dominated by extreme feelings of fear. The daily life of the city dwellers is haunted by horror and fear. In part one, Marie was scared during the picnic with her cousin in the mountains: "He took me out on a sled / And I was frightened. He said, Marie/ Marie, hold on tight. And down we went/ in the mountains, there you feel free" (Eliot 1973: 235). The lover in the Hyacinth garden was also afraid because of his awareness of the reality of his death-in-life existence: "I was neither/Living nor dead and I knew nothing"(Eliot 1973: 235). Further, Madame Sosostris the "famous clairvoyante" is afraid of being arrested by the police: "One must be careful these days". She also warns her clients to "fear death by water" (Eliot 1973: 236). Moreover, feelings of horror and fear haunt the multitudes of soldiers over London Bridge on their way to die in WWI. The narrator identifies Stetson among the crowd engaging in a one-sided dialogue which has overtones of fear and death: "That corpse you planted last year in your garden / Has it begun to sprout? Will it bloom this year?" (Eliot 1973: 236).

In addition to death and fear, Eliot's city is depicted as a modern alternative to Sodom, the Biblical city, dominated by sin and moral corruption. The poet's central persona travels on the periphery of the city witnessing different kinds of moral depravity and sexual corruption: "At the violet hour, when the eyes and back/turn upward from the desk/when the human engine waits/ like a taxi throbbing waiting" (Eliot 1973: 240). In Eliot's city, women turn into sex machines like the typist in the preceding scene who is involved in illicit sexual affair with "the young man carbuncular" employed as "a small house agent's clerk". The sexual meeting happens in the typist's flat in an atmosphere of boredom and indifference:

The meal is ended, she is bored and tired,
Endeavors to engage her in caresses
Which still are unproved, if undesired.
Flushed and decided, he assaults at once;
Exploring hands encounter no defense;
His vanity requires no response,
And makes a welcome of indifference (Eliot 1973: 240).

The sexual encounter which is devoid of any romantic feelings "flushed and decided, he assaults at once" takes place in the dirty flat of the typist, a symbol of the moral squalor and artificiality integral to city life:

The typist home at teatime clears her breakfast, lights
Her stove, and lays out food in tins.
Out of the window perilously spread
Her drying combinations touched by the sun's last rays,
On the divan are piled (at night her bed)
Stockings, slippers, camisoles, and stays (Eliot 1973: 240).

The sexual affair between the dirty looking house agent's clerk and the female typist is undoubtedly part of the sinful life of a city which harbors "the loitering heirs" who have casual sex on the banks of the Thames then disappear in the big city. The Thames river which carries the remains of the sinful meetings "silk handkerchiefs, cardboard boxes

cigarette ends/ or other testimony of summer nights” (239) unfortunately becomes part and parcel of an atmosphere of pollution dominating the city: “the sound of horns and motors” (239). In Eliot’s poem, environmental pollution and moral corruption turn London, the historic city, into an inferno identifying it with other vile cities particularly Sodom and Gomorrah, the cities of Israel which were burnt by fire because they harbor sinful people.

In *The Waste Land*, where the city dwellers are transformed into robots and sex machines, God does not exist, love is absent and illegal sexual affairs end in boredom and guilt. Explicitly, there is no possibility for the development of genuine human relationships in Eliot’s city. After the fulfillment of their bestial desires, the lovers of the city pay no attention to each other:

She turns and looks a moment in the glass,
Hardly aware of her departed lover;
Her brain allows one half-formed thought to pass:
‘Well now that’s done: and I’m glad it’s over (Eliot 1973: 241).

Moreover, in "A Game of Chess", the second part of *The Waste Land*, Belladonna, “the lady of the rocks / the lady of situations” (236), the wealthy woman who is always hysterical and nervous seeks relaxation in illegal sex:

The hot water at ten.
And if it rains, a closed car at four.
And we shall play a game of chess,
Pressing lidless eyes and waiting for a knock upon the door (Eliot 1973: 238).

The reference to the "game of chess" and the "knock on the door" connote illicit sexual involvement peculiar to the inhabitants of Eliot’s city. Suffering from emptiness and boredom, Eliot’s female persona practices sex wherever it is possible even inside her car. The moral depravity and vulgarity of the city dwellers is also depicted through the dialogue between the female characters in the bar scene in the same section of the poem. The low suburban pub scene is endemic to the city life which Eliot wants to expose. In this scene, Lil speaks openly, in a public bar, about her sexual relationship with her husband, Albert, who came back from war: “He’s been in the army four years, he wants a good time / And if you don’t give it him there’s others will” (Eliot 1973: 238). The preceding lines are uttered by Lil’s friend who believes that sex becomes the most important part in the life of married people. However, the miserable women in Eliot’s wasteland are afraid of sexual engagement which would lead to pregnancy and birth of children because their husbands are not interested in supporting their families.

Unlike Belladonna, the childless rich lady who practices sex to overcome the dullness of her life, women from the working class are hesitant to have sex due to fears of pregnancy: “It’s them pills I took, to bring it off, she said / the chemist said it would be all right but I’ve never been the same” (238). In Eliot’s city, women from poor classes take pills, in spite of their harmful effects, to avoid having children - “what you get married for if you don’t want children?” asks Eliot’s narrator - while rich women seek chemical abortions to get rid of their illegal pregnancies. In Eliot’s wasteland, “the nymphs are departed” due to the sexual corruption taking place on the banks of the Thames river and “Philomel” is raped by her relative, the barbarous king who cuts her tongue in order not to disgrace him. In a city where

women are involved in sin even in sea boats “By Richmond I raised my knees/ supine on the floor of a narrow canoe” (242), one suffers from spiritual emptiness and moral bankruptcy.

In "The Fire Sermon", the third part of *The Waste Land*, Eliot's preoccupation with the city motif reaches a peak as his central persona identifies himself with Saint Augustine: “To Carthage then I came / Burning ,burning , burning, burning / O Lord thou Pluckest me out” (Eliot 1973: 242). Eliot's narrator seeks deliverance from the sinful city of London which is transformed into hell. The transformation of the city into an anti-Jerusalem, an inferno, emphasizes the motif of decay integral to Eliot's vision of the modern metropolis. Replete with urban images of city life, *The Waste Land* incorporates paradoxes of city-space to explore the deterioration of human relationships in the industrial city. Due to the subtlety of his artistic techniques and his illuminating engagement with the modern urban environment Eliot becomes the most important city poet in English literature in the first half of the twentieth century. Expressing his anxiety over the drawbacks of modernity, industrialization and the predicament of living in the modern metropolis, Eliot articulates a sophisticated poetics which is imitated, adapted and appropriated by other poets from different cultures particularly from the Arab world. Using Eliot's urban poetry as an inter-text, Al-Sayyab, the most distinctive voice of Arab modernism, develops a hybridized poetics that serves as a mechanism of defense and steadfastness in confrontations with the new realities emerging in the Arab region in the post WWII era.

Reconstructing Eliot's Wasteland Discourse in Al-Sayyab's Poetry

Borrowing the city motif from Eliot's poetry, Al-Sayyab develops a hybridized poetics which aims to challenge local forces of hegemony particularly the Iraqi regime in the post WW II era. In "City of Sinbad", Al-Sayyab presents a complex of binary oppositions through which he defines the image of the city. In Baghdad, Ishtar, the goddess of fertility, suffers from thirst and hunger while Christ fails to achieve his miracles. Imitating Eliot's style in *The Waste Land*, particularly the following line: “Who is the third who walks always beside you? (Eliot 1973: 244), Al-Sayyab raises some questions about the nature of life in the Arab metropolis using Biblical allusions:

Who is this that gave us to drink from a mirage,
And concealed the plague in the rain?
Death is being born in houses,
Cain is being born in order to tear out life
From the womb of earth and from the wellspring of water,
And it will soon be dark (Khouri 1974: 101).

While rain in Eliot's wasteland is a symbol of resurrection, Al-Sayyab's rain does not bring fertility to the city but it brings disease and plague. In addition to references to Christ, Lazarus and Judas, Al-Sayyab alludes to the Biblical narrative of Cain and Abel in order to affirm the existence of evil in the Arab city in addition to Arab-Arab conflicts: “Cain is being born in order to tear out life/from the womb of earth”. In Al-Sayyab's vicious city, “Christ will perish before Lazarus” and “women are aborting in slaughterhouses.” The city of Baghdad, governed by dictators and tyrants, is viewed as an evil spot where women are killed by its rulers. Appropriating Christian narratives, appropriated from Eliot, to articulate local political contexts, Al-Sayyab refers to the victimization of Lazarus and Christ in the Arab city: “His flesh is cut into strips” to be sold in “the city of sinners / the city of bullets and boulders.” (Khouri 1974: 101). While Eliot used wasteland narratives such as vegetation

mythology and rituals of fertility, symbolized by Adonis, to signify the moral predicament of Europe after WWI, Al-Sayyab incorporates the dead Lazarus tale as reflection of the state of political stagnation and moral bankruptcy in the Arab world in the post WW II era. The revival of Lazarus, which is not possible in Al-Sayyab's world, paves the way for the rebirth and emergence of a new generation to replace the fossilized rulers and the tyrannical regimes responsible for the backwardness of the Middle Eastern region. Identifying Baghdad as an embodiment of political corruption and moral indifference², Al-Sayyab turns the city into a central motif in Arabic literature providing a watershed of urban poetics after WW II.

In "City of Sinbad," Al-Sayyab used western myths and eastern legends as well as Muslim, Christian and Hebraic religious symbols "introduced under the influence of Eliot and through the medium of Frazer's *Golden Bough*" (Moreh 1976: 246) to articulate his vision of the Arab world in the 1950's. Linking Christian and Muslim religious traditions, Al-Sayyab introduces Christ and Prophet Mohamed as sacrificial figures crushed by the Iraqi tyrants. The poet hopes that the streaming blood of Christ would bring salvation to the cursed city of Baghdad which symbolizes all the cities of repression in the Arab world. However, the attempt of salvation ends in disappointment and frustration because Adonis is killed in Iraq, Prophet Muhammad is crucified, Christ is dead, and Lazarus refuses to be resurrected. Obviously, the bleeding wounds of Christ fail to bring salvation to Al-Sayyab's sinful city because the Iraqi wasteland is not ready for redemption. Therefore, aspects of sterility and infertility pervades the core of "City of Sinbad" to underline the difficulty of bringing salvation to Iraq in the 1940's and 1950's. Even when rain falls down it only comes in the form of blood signifying the massacres of the Iraqi nationalists at the hands of the Marxist/tyrannical regime of Abdul-Karim Qasim in the post war era.

Responding to the feelings of loneliness and nausea resulting from his life in Baghdad during Qasim's reign, Al-Sayyab focuses on the city's aspects of ugliness and sterility. In Baghdad² as well as in other Arab cities, real heroes disappear giving way to tyrants who symbolize defeat and false heroism. Instead of nationalist heroes who defend their countries and peoples, Al-Sayyab introduces what he calls " a human horseman"(Khouri 1974 : 101), a knight who penetrates the streets of the city slaughtering women and spreading horror everywhere as an embodiment of a world torn by internal conflicts. The "human horseman" who brutally murders women and babies "dyeing the cradles with blood" is a negation of all meanings of heroism well-known in ancient times in the cultural mythology of the Arab world. Thus, in Al-Sayyab's vile city, rain turns into a plague and Arab dictators continued the murder and persecution of their people in a merciless and ritualistic manner. In this context, Baghdad, the center of Arab culture, is depicted as a slaughterhouse and a modern Babylon:

As if walled, ancient Babylon
Had returned once again!
With its high domes of iron
Where a bell is ringing, as if a cemetery
Were moaning in it, and the heavens
The courtyard of a slaughterhouse (Khouri 1974: 101).

Evoking the painful experience of the Israelites in the city of Babylon, Al-Sayyab links the Jewish tragic history of exile and dispossession with the fate of the Iraqi people under the tyrannical regimes of the post WW II era. Appropriating narratives of persecution and Diaspora from western culture, Al-Sayyab, in "City of Sinbad", introduces Baghdad, as a

modern Babylon where its streets turn into mass graves and its gardens become locations for scenes of genocide:

Its hanging gardens are sown
 With heads cut off by sharp axes,
 And the crows peck at their eyes,
 While suns set in the west
 Behind their hair dyed in branches.
 And is this my city? Are these the ruins?
 On which was inscribed: "Long live life"
 With the blood of its slain?
 Is there no god in that place, no water or fields? (Khouri 1974: 103).

Explicitly, Al-Sayyab condemns a city where "gardens are sown" with "heads cut off by sharp axes" recalling Eliot's death imagery in the opening section of *The Waste Land*. Moreover, Al-Sayyab laments a city where heavens become courtyard of a brutal massacre and "the crows peck at their eyes while sun set in the west". The disappointed poet is disturbed by the scenes of corruption and is shocked by the spectacle of the city streets which turn into pools of blood. Being astounded by the scene of the blood of the slain citizens, Al-Sayyab cries out: "Is this my city? / Is there no god in that place?"

To reveal his sense of shock at the current conditions of life in the Arab world, the poet describes Baghdad as a city slaughtered by the "daggers of the Tatars". Al-Sayyab's city "unvisited by the moon" is besieged by the forces of darkness which blocked its gates terminating any attempts to save the city or bring salvation to its people. The poet's sense of disillusionment and awe as he confronts the horrible reality of the city reaches a climax when he discovers that the streets of the city have turned into a sterile wildness "and the desert pants/ with thirst around its streets". As in Eliot's wasteland, Al-Sayyab's city is transformed into a desert because the Iraqi dictators have committed all kinds of crimes and sins bringing curse to their land. Due to their crimes, Baghdad, the capital city of the Islamic empire in the golden era of Muslim expansion and glory, is metamorphosed into an inferno where death, corruption, prostitution and treachery prevail: "Are these the pits / and these the bones? / the shadows look down from houses" (103).

Ironically, the poem which starts with a desire of resurrection and rebirth ends in death and decay. In the beginning of the poem, Al-Sayyab desperately reveals his hopes that fertility may be regained in the barren Iraqi city alluding to Eliot's opening lines in *The Waste Land*: "I cried out in winter/Bestir, O rain". Resuming his prayer and appealing to rain, the poet says:

Make the roots break through,
 And burden down the trees.
 And you came, O rain,
 The sky and the clouds broke forth to anoint you,
 And the rocks were split open, (Khouri 1974: 93).

The reference to "the rain" and "the roots" in the beginning of the poem evokes Eliot's lines "April is the cruelest month breeding/ Lilacs out of the dead land, mixing / memory and desire stirring/ dull roots with spring rain" (Eliot 1973: 243), associating Al-Sayyab's city with Eliot's moral wildness. Al-Sayyab also utilizes Eliot's Christian symbols and fertility

gods at the end of the poem to emphasize the image of Baghdad as a wasteland city waiting for a savior to bring salvation to its barren soil. Concluding the poem with a highly pessimistic passage Al-Sayyab incorporates Biblical figures to articulate the bitter realities of the Arab city:

Is this my city? With injured domes,
In which red-robed Judas
Set the dogs on the cradles
Of my little brothers and the houses,
They eat of their flesh
And in the village Ishtar is dying of thirst,
There are no flowers on her forehead
And in her hands there is a basket, its fruits are stones
Which she casts at every woman. And in the palm trees
On the city's shore there is a wailing (Khouri 1974: 103).

Alluding to the political intrigues and military conspiracies that tore Iraq apart in the post WW II era, Al-Sayyab uses Judas as a symbol of betrayal to reflect the situation in Iraq at that time. The references to the city with “injured domes” and the reference to the wailing “palm trees” underline the miserable life of the Iraqi people under the totalizing regimes of the post war era. The brutal dictators in Iraq are evoked through the image of “red-robed Judas” due to the horrible crimes and atrocities they committed against their people. The members of the Iraqi police apparatus who serve the interests of the regime are depicted as mad dogs feeding on the blood of the innocent: “set the dogs on the cradles / of my little brothers” (103).

Whereas the city is viewed as a delusive entity, the country is associated with an ideal past, a motif recurring in Al-Sayyab's urban poetry. Nevertheless, in “City of Sinbad”, the village is also used as a symbol of sterility. While the dogs of Judas were ravaging Al-Sayyab's city, the village was ruined by ignorance and barrenness. Therefore, in the village “Ishtar is dying of thirst / there are no flowers on her forehead” (103). Ishtar's basket, which is supposed to be full of fruits and flowers, symbol of fertility, is loaded with stones, an epitome of sterility. Due to the dark realities of life in the Arab world, all values are turned upside down and Ishtar who is supposed to provide women with fertility is captured in a scene where she casts her stones “at every woman”. Combining symbols and myths absorbed from Eliot's modernist heritage and Middle Eastern sources, Al-Sayyab delineates a tragic image of life in Iraq and the Arab region during the post WW II era.

The Adaptation of Eliot's City Narratives in Al-Sayyab's Poetry

In Al-Sayyab's poetry, Eliot's city narratives are appropriated, recycled and disseminated to fit the political constructs of the Iraqi poet. In *The Waste Land*, Eliot recalls ancient London, the historical icon of the Elizabethan era, comparing it with the modern city in order to condemn the deterioration of inherited moral traditions in his own time. Al-Sayyab juxtaposes Baghdad³, the vile city, to Jaikur, the poet's birth place village expressing nostalgia for a way of life characterized by simplicity and the dominance of respectable rural values. Further, Eliot's Christian traditions and mythic constructs symbolizing salvation and deliverance from sin are transformed into a revolutionary dynamics to confront the totalizing policies of the Iraqi regimes in the era of decolonization. While Eliot finds refuge in

Christian rituals, Al-Sayyab seeks salvation in armed revolution as the only possible way to remove a rotten system and bring fertility to the land of Iraq.

It is known that Eliot constructs *The Waste Land* on an ancient myth which indicates that the land of a particular kingdom is laid waste because its ruler who is called the Fisher King commits the sin of adultery. In James Frazer's *the Golden Bough*, the basic source of Eliot's poem, the catastrophic consequences of the Fisher King's sin which leads to the barrenness of his land are removed when a questing knight is engaged in a Christian ritual of suffering including a purgatorial journey that paves the way for salvation. In Al-Sayyab's poetry, Eliot's wasteland narrative is appropriated to fit the local political situation of Iraq and the Arab world after WWII. Transforming Eliot's Christian rituals into a revolutionary poetics, Al-Sayyab points out that the Fisher Kings of the Arab world, who committed all kinds of sins against their own people bringing curse to the region, should be confronted with violence and blood sacrifices in order to bring fertility to the barren land of the region.

Capturing Eliot's hellish metropolis which is dominated by corruption and sin, Al-Sayyab appropriates the city motif, absorbed from *The Waste Land*, to fit the Iraqi condition in the post WW II era. Terri DeYoung points out that in the post WW II era, the cities in the Arab world "became the places where social tensions were most apparent, [therefore] the alienated characters of Eliot's poems became apt models for the portrayal of similar figures in the Arabic poetry of the 1950's" (DeYoung 2000: 6). Adapting Eliot's city motifs and modernist symbols, Al-Sayyab does not aim to juxtapose an ideal past with a corrupt present but to compare the stagnant life of the city with its counterpart in the village in order to deplore the decadence of the former. Unlike Eliot who compares the secretaries of London city with the sea nymphs or contemporary lovers with Anthony and Cleopatra, Al-Sayyab compares the evil of Baghdad with the innocence and purity of Jaikur. Thus, Jaikur provides the urge toward the poet's search for an Arab Utopia, the unattainable city, dominated by freedom, democracy and other western values.

While the sterility of the wasteland community triggers Eliot to look for the ideal city, Saint Augustine's city of God, the tyranny and injustice of the tyrannical regime in Baghdad pushed Al-Sayyab toward Jaikur. Viewing urban life as a state of sterility, isolation and loss, the poet describes Baghdad in Burton Pike's words as "a labyrinth that cannot be viewed in its entirety, a composite picture" (Pike 1981: 9). However, the evil of the Arab city is not attributed to an age of industrialization and modernity, as in Eliot's poetry, but is the result of eras of tyranny, persecution and political corruption. In other words, the hostility toward the city in Al-Sayyab's poetry is the result of regime oppression, police brutalities and other socio-political diseases endemic to the Arab city while Eliot's hatred is attributed to an existential and cultural crisis, the difficulty of living in a highly mechanized metropolis. Incorporating the city motif from Eliot's poetry, Al-Sayyab identifies it with evil, death and political corruption. Therefore, the poet's vision for change and reform in Iraq and the Arab world in the post WW II era ends in frustration and disappointment. For example, in "Jaikur and the City", Al-Sayyab is stuck in the evil webs of the city unable to save the green fields of Jaikur which turn into ashes after being subjected to the hatred and brutality of the city.

In "Jaikur and the City", the poet creates a binary opposition between village and city to underline the anxiety and feelings of alienation which characterize his life in Baghdad. Caught in the labyrinth of the city, the poet recalls Jaikur as a reservoir of hidden signification and perfection affirming the difficulty of reconciliation between the two worlds.

While Jaikur, characterized by its river, Buwaib, and its mud-bricks houses, is described as a paradise full of palm trees, Baghdad is viewed in evil terms:

The city streets coil around me:
 Thongs of mud bite into my heart,
 A dull ember in it yields only clay,
 Cords of fire lash naked melancholy fields,
 They burn Jaikur in the pit of my soul'
 They plant in the pit ashes of rancor (Jayyusi 1987: 42).

In the preceding lines, Baghdad's streets are transformed into poisonous snakes that constantly suffocate and strangle the poet. The opening lines of the poem, cited above, incorporate images which affirm the poet's sense of isolation and confinement in the city. The intensity of urban imagery, adapted from Eliot's poetry, connotes besiege, entrapment, suffocation and estrangement emphasizing the continuation of the process of devastation and spiritual murder of both the poet and the village. As a destructive environment, the city turns into a holocaust location where streets and roads become ropes of fire that "burn Jaikur in the pit of my soul" and "plant in the pit ashes of rancor". Using the city as an objective correlative for death, Al-Sayyab engages popular folklore, a poetic technique acquired from Eliot, including narratives about rural people who go to the city and never come back:

These are streets of which drowsy hearthside legends say:
 From them no more than from the shores of death
 Has any traveler through night returned (Jayyusi 1987: 432)?

Combining Arabic folktales and western mythology, assimilated under Eliot's impact, Al-Sayyab creates a modernist poetics which appropriates western canon to serve local purposes. For example, the poet recalls the myth of the Sphinx from Greek legends to describe the atmosphere of death in the streets of Baghdad, which are depicted as "wings of the Sphinx / two wings that just from buried rock through the subsoil" (Jayyusi 1987: 433). In Al-Sayyab's hybridized poetics, the Sphinx, the horrible creature (in the Greek myth) which stands at the gates of Thebes killing all who enter the city and failing to solve its riddle is used as a symbol of the tyrannical regimes governing Iraq in the 1950's.

Al-Sayyab also engages Islamic heritage using the Quran as an intertext by alluding to the story of Prophet Moses and the Jews linking it to his vision of the Arab city. In Al-Sayyab's poem, the city is implicitly associated with barrenness and sterility represented by the rock analogy: "two wings that just from buried rock through the subsoil" (433). Recollecting the rock image simultaneously from Eliot's *The Waste Land* "come in under the shadow of this red rock" (235) and the Quran, Al-Sayyab transforms it to signify a contrary meaning. In other words, the rock imagery is associated with urban sterility and moral bankruptcy in Al-Sayyab's poem while it is an epitome of spiritual resurrection and fertility in *The Waste Land* and the Quran. In Eliot's poem, the rock image is identified with a state of religious rebirth symbolized by the church and its spiritual traditions. In the Quranic narrative of Prophet Moses and the Israelites, the rock analogy is also associated with fertility and resurrection. According to the Quranic tale, God answered the call of Prophet Moses when he prayed for God to provide him and his thirsty people with a spring of water in the rocky desert:

And remember Moses prayed for water for his people, we said: “strike the rock with thy staff”. Then gushed forth therefore two springs. Each group knew its place for water. So eat and drink of the sustenance provided by Allah and do no evil or mischief on the earth (Fakhri 2001: 12).

Engaging Islamic narratives and comparing the present with the past in an Eliotic sense, Al-Sayyab suggests that while Moses was able to generate water out of the rock, no miracle today is able to regain fertility to the barren cities in the Arab world. Therefore, Al-Sayyab severely condemns the Arab city demonstrating aspects of brutality and corruption which turn it into an earthly hell:

Night, paradise
 Regained, when the rock
 Weaves across the streets a grill
 Of stony twigs, congregates
 The lamps like flame apples
 And prolongs
 Into the taverns a few leaves of the fig tree,
 Who shall kindle love, love
 On every path, in every coffee bar and home?
 Who shall change the human claw into a hand?
 With which the child can wipe his forehead (Jayyusi 1987: 433).

Approaching the city night as a false paradise harboring traitors and regime's agents, the poet describes Baghdad as a painted prostitute. Associating the city's lanterns and lamps with “the fig tree”, the poet depicts Baghdad as a personification of evil and sin, an epitome of life in other Arab cities. By recalling the Biblical and Quranic narrative of temptation in paradise where Adam and Eve had to cover their sexual organs with fig leaves after they committed the Original Sin, Al-Sayyab alludes to the political scandals committed by Arab regimes. Symbolically, the dictatorial leaders dominating the capital cities of the Arab world, unlike Adam and Eve, are unable to conceal their sins because the poet is determined to strip them of the veneer of their sanctity.

While human beings are changed into robots and machines in Eliot's *The Waste Land* “when the human engine waits /like a taxi throbbing, waiting” (240), Al-Sayyab's city dwellers are transformed into beasts of prey: “who shall change the human claw into a hand / with which the child can wipe his forehead?” and the city itself becomes a jungle where the stronger hunts the weaker. Therefore, in Al-Sayyab's poem, the fertility of the village is juxtaposed to the sterility and moral emptiness of the city in order to condemn the latter. In “Jaikur and the City”, the poet hopes that the spiritual traditions represented by the village would rise at the wreck of the immoral values of the city. He implicitly laments the decay of the natural world and the domination of the urban society of the city which replaces the palm trees of the village. In the preceding poem, Baghdad intrudes upon the solitude of Al-Sayyab's village shutting the gates of Jaikur in the face of the poet:

And Jaikur, who is it
 Has shut her doors
 To her child who knocks at them? And the road to her,
 Who diverted it, so that wherever he goes
 The city cranes toward him (Jayyusi 1987: 433).

In "Jaikur and the City", the description of Jaikur, is heavily infused with images of fertility and growth. The village is depicted as a mythic place endowed with miraculous healing powers. Thus, when the image of Baghdad crumbles into patches of time and space, the myth of Jaikur is erected as a symbol of salvation for a nation of homeless and exiled people. Here, Jaikur does not stay on the periphery but lies at the center of Al-Sayyab's urban poetics. In other words, when Baghdad falls down in Al-Sayyab's poetry, Jaikur rises as the spiritual center of the poet whose love for his village does not wane even during his exile. Immersing himself in the memories of Jaikur and mixing mythic and domestic images which provide the poem with its distinctive overtones, the poet writes with the same intensity about Jaikur particularly when being stunned by the pains of nostalgia and exile.

While Jaikur is described as a paradise, Baghdad emerges as a vile city, a modern Babel:

In Babylon
 The dancers are asleep, asleep the iron they sharpen,
 The gasping of gold they hoard glazes
 The eyes of storekeepers: this
 Is the crop of famines from the city's
 Double Eden (Jayyusi 1987: 434).

In the poem, Baghdad, the historically established city, is delineated as a modern Babylon populated with sinners and cursed by famines. As a city of conspiracies, intrigues and deceptions, Baghdad, the ancient capital of the Islamic nation, is reduced to a wasteland and moral wilderness. As a result of being suffocated by the sordidness of Baghdad's urban life, the poet attempts to escape to the delight of the open countryside and its lush green vegetation and palm trees. However, the poet, who is lost in the city labyrinth, "across the night, across the fortified citadels" fails to reach Jaikur because the village is besieged by the vile city and its roads are closed by the Tatars, the Iraqi dictators.

In Al-Sayyab's city, characterized by warehouses and prisons, Ishtar, the goddess of fertility, runs a brothel and the city machine destroys Tammuz, the Babylonian god of resurrection who is brutally killed in the city. The pre-Islamic goddess, the Lat, recollected from pre-Islamic mythology, under Eliot's influence, laments the death of Tammuz: "And the goddess Lat grieves for Tammuz". Like Tammuz, the poet is trapped in the labyrinth of the city unable to return to his village, an epitome of innocence and purity. In "Jaikur and the City", the veins of Tammuz are depicted as branches of a sterile grove extending and stretching along the city's roads, coffee houses, asylums and brothels:

Here are vineyards, their dead sprigs
 veins of Tammuz crossing the city, veins that branch
 through every home and prison, every coffee bar,
 every prison and bar and every nightclub,
 through all the insane asylums,
 every warehouse of Ishtar (Jayyusi 1987: 434).

In addition to references to the "insane asylums" and "warehouse of Ishtar", Al-Sayyab combines pagan / pre-Islamic mythology "the goddess Lat" with western / Christian heritage alluding to the Bible: "this water is my blood, will you drink it? / This flesh is my blood, will

you eat it?" (434). Apparently, the Biblical narrative of sacrifice and martyrdom is merged with the mythic story of Tammuz who is unfortunately murdered by an electric shock. Using electricity as an incarnation of death and evil rooted in the process of industrial urbanization, Al-Sayyab enhances the dangers of city life:

My son's glass blood has been smashed in his veins,
The spark of our house has struck stone,
The city wall
Crushed him, scattered him, flung him down in no time (Jayyusi 1987: 434).

The tragic death of Tammuz, the son of the Goddess, Lat, who is murdered by the city machinery, emphasizes the catastrophic implications of living in Al-Sayyab's metropolis:

He wanted the light, wanted to disperse
darkness....and he was defeated.
she sends out her lament
the voice fades, and the music (Jayyusi 1987: 435).

Like Eliot's city dwellers, Al-Sayyab suffers from alienation and displacement. By the end of the poem, Jaikur, the poet's earthly paradise is besieged by the city, and surrounded by fences and gates; therefore, the poet is forbidden from entering into his beloved village. Being trapped forever, like a prisoner in the labyrinth of the evil city, the poet, who is identified with Tammuz, becomes the object of the city's moral paralysis and spiritual death.

In "Jaikur and the City" the poet's haunting memories of Jaikur and Baghdad are eloquently and intensely expressed through modernist poetic techniques, assimilated from Eliot's poetry, such as juxtaposition where the innocence of the village is constantly emphasized to signify the evil of the city. Nevertheless, the vile city remains in the center of the poem in spite of the distinct impressions associated with the village. In this context, it is noteworthy to argue that the poetic city in Al-Sayyab's poetry, though influenced by Eliot's western urbanism, has its own distinctive features. Unlike his western forebears such as Eliot, Pound and Baudelaire who are alienated in the city due to psychological anxiety and existential boredom born out of living in a post-industrial metropolis, the Arab poet suffers mainly from persecution and political oppression.

In spite of being considered as a refuge and a source of poetic and spiritual inspiration, in Arabic culture, the village failed to save the modernist Arab poet from the tyranny of the city. By the end of "Jaikur and the City", the poet is seen in a state of utter despair and powerlessness unable to pass through the gates of Jaikur, surrounded by the monstrous city. Introducing the village as a symbol of lost innocence, and purity in opposition to the sterile city of political corruption and impotence, Al-Sayyab aims to expose the evil nature of the Arab metropolis in the era of decolonization. Deeply engaged in Baghdad's political life in the 1940's and 1950's, Al-Sayyab delineates a city dominated by police informers and sinful rulers who transform the historical city into a web of prisons and graveyards.

Trapped in the vile city of Baghdad, Al-Sayyab expresses feelings of nostalgia toward his village, Jaikur. In "Jaikur and the Trees of the City", Al-Sayyab captures Jaikur in romantic terms viewing it as a pastoral paradise: "Its trees are evergreen / and tall as pillars of marble / they are neither bare nor sear / their nights are sleepless" (Bishai 2001: 48). In Al-

Sayyab's poetry, the night of Baghdad is identified as a world of sin and moral corruption whereas "the stars whisper their melodies / at night in Jaikur / flowers are born / and in the eyes of children / there is the flutter of wings" (Bishai 2001: 48). Unlike Baghdad, the city of apocalypse, Jaikur is distinguished by its purity and beautiful climate: "The summer has colors of its own / so has the winter / and at night in Jaikur / the stars whisper their melodies". In the poem, Jaikur is associated with fertility and resurrection: "And tonight there is rain is Jaikur / showering shadows" (Bishai 2001: 46). Contrary to the gloomy image of Baghdad which is dominated by death, disease and fear (like Eliot's wasteland), Jaikur is depicted in Utopian and pastoral terms: "The clouds have passed over the road / whitened by the light of the moon / almost wiping it out / stealing the flowers" (Bishai 2001: 48).

Due to his life in Baghdad, the city of prisons, brothels and madhouses, Al-Sayyab associates himself with the sacrificial and slain gods he absorbed from Eliot's heritage. For example, in "The River and Death", the poet, who is crucified in Baghdad, identifies himself with Christ on the cross. Lamenting his life in the city of sinners, Al-Sayyab expresses his desire for martyrdom hoping that his blood would redeem the evil city and its alien dwellers: "I long to sink to the depths in my blood / to bear my load with other men / to resurrect life / then is my death a victory" (Khouri 1974: 107). Using Christian imagery, drawn from western sources, the poet reflects his agony and fears in the city, described as "the world of sorrow" and dominated by the smell of death and bloodshed. To Al-Sayyab, Baghdad, under the tyrannical regimes of the post war era, turns into a slaughterhouse "gushing over with blood and tears like rain". Being trapped in the maze of the sinful city, the poet longs for death offering his blood as a sacrifice that may pave the way for redemption and remove the curse: "And in my blood a somber yearning / For a bullet whose sudden ice / will bore the depths of my breast / like hellfire set ablaze my bones" (Khouri 1974: 107).

Like Eliot's wasteland, Al-Sayyab's city is inhabited by outcasts and alien residents as well as victims of poverty, tyranny and oppression. The poet's residence in Baghdad made him aware of the problems confronting the dwellers of the city particularly political prisoners and other oppressed minorities. Therefore Al-Sayyab's city is predominantly inhabited by exiles, outcasts and the victims of the regime. Moreover, the city is depicted as an inferno harboring Judas, a symbol of treachery, and Cerberus, the multi-headed dog that guards the gates of hell in Greek mythology. In addition to countless police informers, Baghdad is populated by pimps, whores and other categories of homeless people. Thus, in "The Blind Prostitute", Baghdad is delineated as a modern Sodom where people are not transformed into figures of salt but into savage beasts. Coming from a rural background, Al-Sayyab's archetypal prostitute lost her virginity and honor in the city. In the brutal city, which devours its residents, Al-Sayyab's prostitute also lost her only daughter in addition to her eyesight. Forced to work as a whore in order to survive after the murder of her father by a feudal lord, Al-Sayyab's fallen woman represents the female victims of a patriarchal culture, which oppresses women.

Drawing on Eliot's representation of the prostitute figure in *The Waste Land*, Al-Sayyab underlines motifs such as sterility and moral corruption. While Eliot's prostitutes such as the London secretary and the lady in "A Game of Chess" who practices sex in the street: "If it rains, a closed car at four" (238), are part of the sordidness and stagnation of the industrial metropolis, Al-Sayyab's whore is a victim of a tyrannical regime who turns the people of Iraq into exiles and outcasts. The miserable story of the blind prostitute generates feelings of sadness in the poet who also suffers from alienation and displacement, therefore he identifies himself with all the victims of the city. The hardships and sterility of the city

makes the poet think of returning to his village, therefore, he recollects his rural memories during a hallucinatory vision. Recalling his childhood in Jaikur, the poet imagines himself laying at the bed of the village's river, Buwaib, which springs from Shat al-Arab, a water area separating between southern Iraq and Iran: "I am laying in its bed of sand /in its fragrant mud, the blood of my veins flows/in its pure water /steaming to bestow life on the roots of palms / my soul oozes in the leaves and fruit /and the water whispers in its coolness"(cited in Moreh 1998: 156).

The shadowy but authoritative presence of Eliot that could be discerned through some allusions in "The Blind Prostitute" becomes apparent in "City without Rain" where Al-Sayyab extensively manipulates western and eastern myths and symbols to express the deteriorating condition of life in Iraq and the Arab world in the post war era. Reflecting a deep feeling of agony and exile, the poet argues that Baghdad, due to eras of tyranny and oppression, turns into a prison and moral wilderness. Like other Arab cities where "gods [are] looking with no compassion", Baghdad is in dire need for resurrection. Unfortunately "the goddess of blood returns" to the city cursing its inhabitants and roaming "aimlessly from house to house" (Boullata 1976: 3). In Baghdad, the people suffer from famine and starvation "hungry are we" while the goddess of fertility pays no attention because she has nothing to offer: "her hands are empty / her eyes are harsh". In a world cursed by gods, and tyrannized by Arab dictators, Al-Sayyab sees no possibility of salvation and the people are waiting for a savior or a Christ-figure who never comes. Imitating Eliot's line in "What the Thunder Said?", the fifth part of *The Waste Land*, "there is no water but only rock", Al-Sayyab portrays a world where lightening and clouds are barren and thunder comes without rain. Instead of "pregnant" clouds which bring rain, the people are subjected to thunderous storms which may burn them, therefore, they live in a state of shock and fear.

We spent year after year after year watching
thunderous, lightning clouds with no rain
and winds like which neither pass as a storm
nor lie quiet- we sleep and wake up in fear of them (Boullata 1976: 3).

Referring to a deformed resurrection, the poet speaks about a city whose fire has no flames and whose "lanes and houses have fever" (Boullata 1976: 3). In "City without Rain", Al-Sayyab emphasizes that the Arab world is a wasteland where Tammuz and Ishtar are unable to bring fertility to the soil. As a result of eras of cultural stagnation and political tyranny, the Arab world is transformed into a graveyard and all attempts to resurrect the dead people of the Arab cities are futile and useless:

A spark is about to fly, its dead are about to rise:
"Tammuz has awakened from his muddy sleep under the grape bowers,
Tammuz has awakened, returned to green Babel to care for it",
The drums of Babel are about to beat, but through its castles
The wind's whistle and the moan of it's sick predominate
In the chambers of Astarte
The earthenware censers remain empty with no fire.
Invocation rises as if all the throats of the reeds
In the swamps were crying:
Panting with exhaustion, (Boullata 1976: 3).

Using images of sterility, disease and death, absorbed from Eliot, Al-Sayyab describes a city which turns into a wasteland where “death inching its way between light and darkness and branch after branch the vine withers” (Boullata 1976: 3). Therefore, in "City without Rain", the Arab city is described as a horrible beast, with “wide jaws”, which devours its people and “our virgins are sad and listless around Astarte / As water dries up bit by bit in her face” (Boullata 1976: 3).

AL-Sayyab's preceding lines echo the fifth part of *The Waste Land* where Eliot depicts a scene of suffering in the mountains. In "What the Thunder Said", the dwellers of Eliot's sinful city are captured as they continue their purgatorial journey searching for salvation:

Amongst the rock one cannot stop or think
Sweat is dry and feet are in the sand
If there were only water amongst the rock
Dead mountain mouth of carious teeth that cannot spit
Here one can neither stand nor lie nor sit
There is not even silence in the mountains
But dry sterile thunder without rain
There is not even solitude in the mountains
But red sullen faces sneer and snarl
From doors of mudcracked houses (Eliot 1973: 243).

Evoking Eliot's lines, Al-Sayyab, in “City without Rain”, delineates an image of total barrenness and sterility:

But years have passed, so many we have not counted them,
with no rain – not even a drop,
with no flowers – not even one flower.
With no fruits: as if our barren palms were idols we erected.
So that we might wither and die under them.
Our Lord has forsaken us
Ah, for his tomb!
Is there not in your muddy bottom one jar
in which there are remains of the Lord's blood, or a seed? (Boullata 1976: 4)

Using rain as a central symbol of resurrection, adapted from Eliot's poetry, Al-Sayyab portrays an Arab wasteland waiting for redemption which never takes place and a savior who never comes: “yearly the savior bears his burning around / the wound of the rotating world / and yearly returns to redeem it and brings flowers and rain” (Boullata 1976: 4). In "City without Rain", all efforts to bring fertility to the Arab world are thwarted by tyrannical regimes dominating the fate of the Arab people. Therefore, attempts to bring reform and democracy to the barren Arab land ended up in disappointment and chaos: “his hand awaking us with a wound”. According to the poem, the oppressive tyrants who govern Baghdad and the rest of the capital cities in the region are responsible for the state of moral bankruptcy, which turn the Arab world into a wasteland bringing anarchy to the entire Middle Eastern region.

Combining symbols appropriated from Eliot with pre-Islamic narratives, Al-Sayyab depicts a barren world: “with no rain – not even drop / with no flowers not even one flower /

with no fruits”. Al-Sayyab also recalls the pre-Islamic habit of erecting idols out of palm dates: “As if our barren palms were idols we erected / so that we might wither and die under them”. While the palm trees in pre-Islamic folklore, recorded in the history of ancient Arabia, are associated with fertility, Al-Sayyab’s palms are barren and sterile. The sterility of Al-Sayyab’s city includes everything with no exception including the gods who become impotent after losing their vitality and regenerative powers. While the existence of Christ “The Hanged Man” provides hope for the wasteland dwellers, in Eliot’s poem, God is dead in Al-Sayyab’s city: “our lord has forsaken us / Ah, for his tomb”. This image of utter desperation and pessimism is a vivid description of life in the Arab world in the post WWII era which reflects the poet’s perspective toward the tragic development in the Arab world.

In spite of the miserable conditions in the Arab world, Al-Sayyab’s poem which opens with an expectation of rain in Babylon, ends with real fall-drops in the city. The inhabitants of the city, inflicted with the curse of hypocritical and tyrannical regimes who turn the city into a slaughterhouse, are given a glance of hope by the end of the poem. Imitating Eliot’s poetic techniques in “What the Thunder Said?”, and adapting western Christian symbols to fit his political purposes, Al-Sayyab uses Christ as a savior coming to redeem the sinful city. Integrating Eliot’s poetic strategies and mythic narratives into Arabic poetry, Al-Sayyab also depicts rituals of sacrifice that would lead to salvation in a sophisticated manner. Thus, the children of Baghdad “Babel”, the sinful city, are depicted while praying for rain and redemption by appealing to Astarte:

The little ones of Babel walked carrying cactus baskets
 And fruits of earthenware as offerings for Astarte.
 Like a shadow of water, plant and fire
 A shimmer of lightning lights
 Their little round faces as they pray for rain
 A field of blossoms is about to open up as they shine
 And like a thousand butterflies scattered on the horizon,
 Their little hymn rises softly:
 “Our brothers’ tombs call us (Boullata 1976: 4)

Like Eliot, Al-Sayyab utilizes symbols absorbed from eastern and western mythology to indicate death, fertility and resurrection intensifying the implications of his poetry. Echoing Eliot’s lines which suggest redemption in *The Waste Land* “shall I at least set my lands in order / London Bridge is falling down”, Al-Sayyab maps out the way for salvation. Deprived of freedom, democracy and an honorable life, the dwellers of the Arab wasteland long for redemption from tyranny and oppression. Dreaming of freedom and justice, the inhabitants of the Arab city wait for the moment of deliverance with anticipation: “In an eternity of listening between one thunder and the next / we heard – not the rustle of palms under torrential rains / or the whispers of winds under wet trees” (Boullata 1976: 5). Finally salvation takes place and rain which symbolizes rebirth and fertility begins to fall on the evil city: “A gift from the cloud / A silver of water, a drop which a breeze whispered (5). In spite of the scarcity of rain, there is a possibility of salvation: “We know that Babel will be cleansed of its sins (5).

After the destruction of a materialistic civilization epitomized by the collapse of evil cities in *The Waste Land* “Falling Towers / Jerusalem Athens / Alexandria / Vienna / London / Unreal”, Eliot finds salvation in a return to genuine Christian values and traditions. Unlike Eliot, Al-Sayyab finds salvation in the elimination of an entire order, a fossilized culture and

a stagnant web of tyrannical regimes that pulled the Arab world backward toward the medieval eras. Therefore, Al-Sayyab uses Christian allusions not for religious purposes but to articulate his revolutionary vision of a world ravaged by defeats and cursed by tyrannical regimes. Using Christ as a savior or as an Arab revolutionary, Al-Sayyab seeks salvation in popular awakening and revolution which would inevitably lead to the collapse of the corrupt regimes in the Arab region. Modeled on Eliot's "Falling Towers", Baghdad becomes an embodiment of all Arab cities which must be eradicated in order to pave the way for the erection of a better world.

In *The Waste Land*, Eliot's Babel is not London or New York or Athens or Alexandria but any other city in the world. Imitating Eliot and reflecting the sordidness and stagnation of the Arab cities in the post WW II era, Al-Sayyab's evil city is not only Baghdad but also Cairo, Damascus, Beirut, Riyadh, Tehran or any other metropolis in the Middle Eastern wasteland. While Eliot's London has universal dimensions that could be drawn on any other metropolis in the civilized world, Al-Sayyab's city has distinguished features integral to the experience of tyranny, corruption, deception, treachery, defeat, false heroism and lack of democracy integral to the Arab world. While Eliot's idealistic city (Saint Augustine's city of God) is attainable, Al-Sayyab's Utopian city is Iram, the many-columned city, mentioned in the Quran: "Seest thou not how thy Lord dealt with the Ad (people) / of the city of Iram, with lofty pillars / the like of which were not produced in (all) the land?" (Fakhri 2001: 913). As an illusive city, Iram is not available so far to the Arab poet who attempts to reach it but he inevitably fails: "O Iram /when it was lost, I felt guilty / there is pain in my heart / the dream of my youth is lost / and my life comes to an end" (Cited in Abbas 1978: 117).

Conclusion

Providing Al-Sayyab with western narratives such as the city / country dialectics and the fertility/regeneration motif, Eliot opens new horizons for the Iraqi poet who consequently incorporates Biblical myths, pre-Islamic deities and other traditions from eastern and western sources. Apparently, Al-Sayyab intertextualizes his urban poetry with western narratives and symbols because he seeks urgent involvement with non-indigenous traditions in order to provide insight and new perspectives to his poetic vision. In an attempt to be emancipated from hegemonic discourses associated with a culture rooted in religious stagnation and political tyranny, Al-Sayyab seeks salvation through a hybridized poetics to overcome the challenges of a new era. Ironically, Al-Sayyab, under Eliot's impact, recovered his native mythology particularly Babylonian and Phoenician mythology with its emphasis on cyclical regeneration and rebirth erected on the Tammuz tradition and other indigenous deities.

In this context, it is significant to state that Al-Sayyab and other modernist Arab poets, due to Eliot's influence, turn to the myths of the ancient near east for their symbolism. For the first time in Arabic poetry, myths associated with non-Islamic and pagan narratives are used on a wide scale. Al-Sayyab incorporates Assyrian and pre-Islamic myths combining them with Biblical/western narratives to articulate his vision of the deteriorating situation of the Arab region in the aftermath of WW II. Further, he used folktale figures such as Sinbad, assimilated from *The Arabian Nights*, in addition to prominent personae well-known in Islamic history. For example he used Al-Hussain, the grandson of Prophet Mohamed, as a major symbol associating him with Christ, due to his sacrificial death at the battle of Karbala, Southern of Iraq, during the early Islamic era.

Unlike Eliot who utilizes rituals and myths to express his moral vision, Al-Sayyab incorporates Eliot's narratives to achieve revolutionary and nationalistic purposes integral to the Arab world in an era of enormous ramifications. In addition to western symbols and myths, Al-Sayyab also integrates Eliot's literary forms and aesthetic strategies into the fabric of his hybrid poetics using techniques such as internal monologues, objective correlatives, allusions, juxtapositions, masks and personae to give more depth to his vision. Engaging western modernism and Eliot's literary heritage, Al-Sayyab's poetry becomes the center of an intertextual web which contains strands from a variety of works and traditions. Regardless of the fact that the Arab world and the West are divided along religious and cultural lines, Al-Sayyab struggles to implement a poetics capable of engaging western and eastern cultures. In his city poetry, Al-Sayyab creates a verse form and a matrix of allusions which is neither western nor eastern. In other words, the Iraqi poet develops a cross-cultural poetics inspired by Eliot which involves a process in which something is created in the Arab world that is neither indigenous to the region nor identical with its western counterpart.

Writing at the crossroads within western tradition and outside it, Al-Sayyab assimilates Eliot's urban motifs and modernist discourses transforming them into a poetics of confrontation to challenge local hegemony and oppression. Engaging western colonial texts, Al-Sayyab does not aim to disrupt them but to integrate them into the Arabic literary canon. Drawn to Eliot's modernism particularly his concept of tradition because Eliot absorbs tradition without being fettered by it, the Iraqi poet combines eastern and western narratives into a hybrid poetics incorporating sophisticated techniques such as the evocation of myth, the use of allusions, objective correlatives, intertextuality and other forms of literary influence. In different poems by Al-Sayyab, Eliot's texts and modernist narratives are appropriated and deployed as a mechanism of confrontation against local enemies and repressive regimes. The process of appropriation broadens the scope of Arabic poetry expanding it beyond regional borders through an assimilation of western cultural and literary traditions. Further, the act of negotiation and interaction with western culture and literature results into the hybridization of modern Arabic poetry and the development of a poetics able to address the aspirations of the Arab people in an era of change and chaos. Composed in a third world context and written in a non-western language, Al-Sayyab's trans-cultural poetics removes, to some extent, the dividing lines which separate between third world literature and what George Gugelburger calls the "polyglot aspects of the Euro-American modernist tradition" (Gugelburger 1991: 518).

Notes

1. The Iraqi poet, Badr Shaker Al-Sayyab was born in 1926 in southern Iraq. After his graduation from the English Department in Baghdad's Teachers College, he became one of the most prominent Arab poets during the post WWII era. Since the late 1940's, Al-Sayyab pioneered the free verse movement, the backbone of Arab modernism, challenging conventional rules of poetic composition which dominated Arabic poetry for centuries. Due to his ideological commitments, Al-Sayyab protested against the tyrannical regime of Abdul-Karim Qasim, the Iraqi president who removed the royal family during the 1958 revolution. As a result of Al-Sayyab's political doctrine, he was dismissed out of his job and put in jail. Subsequently he was banished from his country to live in exile and poverty. In spite of his revolutionary pursuits, Al-Sayyab found a liberating force in western Christianity transforming Christ into a symbol standing for Arab nationalists, victimized by their regimes. As a transnational poet, Al-Sayyab was influenced by western figures such as Lorca, Pound, Edith Sitwell but he was indebted, in particular, to Eliot's poetic legacy. In 1964, Al-Sayyab died prematurely in exile, as a result of a mysterious disease, leaving behind him seven poetic anthologies and several translations of western poets.

2. As a resident of Baghdad during the 1940's, Al-Sayyab witnessed with awe, the moral collapse of the Iraqi capital. The historical city, which used to be the center of the Islamic Empire, is transformed into an inferno governed by tyrannical regimes and agents of imperialism.
3. Like Eliot, who lived in London in the beginning of the last century, during and after the First World War, Al-Sayyab witnessed the tragic events which took place in Baghdad after the eruption of WWII. In the 1940's, the British occupation forces succeeded in suppressing many popular uprisings particularly, the Iraqi revolution, led by Rashid Aali Al-Kelani. The leaders of the revolution were consequently executed and the traitors as well as the agents of colonization, who escaped outside Iraq during the revolution, were restored. As a student in the Teachers College in Baghdad in the 1940's, Al-Sayyab witnessed with pain the tragic developments of the confrontations between the colonizers and the Iraqi revolutionaries. He also experienced the debate about the conflicts between Nazism and western democracies, between Capitalism and Marxism. Therefore, the poet, at an early age, became part of Baghdad's social life visiting its clubs, coffee shops and brothels. Witnessing the turbulent clashes between the opposition parties and the Iraqi government, Al-Sayyab became part of the political scene in Baghdad participating in demonstrations against the British occupation and the Iraqi regime.

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