

The Poetic Innovation in the Poetry of Ahmed Hijazi

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ABSTRACT

The contemporary Egyptian poet, critic, editor and convener of many conferences and cultural committees Ahmed Abdul Mu'ti Hijazi represents a case of dispute and discussion thanks to the selection of the material of his poems as well as the distinct shape and innovative aspects of his verse. As will be shown in the following pages, Hijazi's version of poetic modernism is devoid of mythology, intersexuality and deliberate obfuscation or self-indulgence. Every word in his poem is aligned in a seamless mosaic that eventually succeeds in conveying the poet's message in clear and lucid but highly suggestive discourse. It is this particular side of his verse that will be highlighted in the present study.

INTRODUCTION

Discussing the profound experience of the contemporary Egyptian poet Ahmed Abdul Mu'ti Hijazi (b. 1935) in the fields of poetry, literary criticism and journalism, becomes a performance multi-dimensional and controversial. He has engaged many administrative positions in the ministry of culture and media. Until recently he has been the editor-in-chief of *Ibda'a* (Creativity) journal which is devoted to publishing the best creative contributions in different fields of literature and art. Also he is a member of a number of cultural committees for annual contests and festivals. Given the diversity of his activities, it is more practical to choose a single activity and highlight its manifestations. In fact tackling his poetic work and its striking presentation of topics often turns into a contesting area for highlighting the predilections and priorities of the researcher as well as the intellectual and artistic standpoints he/she adopts in this matter. As will be seen in the following pages, his poetry belongs to free verse in Arabic literature and the language he uses throughout is remarkable and skilful.

Thus the question of linguistic and technical innovation in his poetry is pretty central and worth investigating. The significance of his achievement lies in his being a modernist that has raised from the very start the banner of free verse as the only legitimate means of expressing the aspirations of people and their innermost wishes. In fact his poetry com-

bines the personal and impersonal simultaneously. He benefited much from his long stay in France for both study and work. This cross-fertilization between his own native culture and the French one has polished his concepts and judgments of the literary work and its objectives and priorities. As such, it is expected that his own version of free verse is marked by a personal touch. Scholar Abdullah Khudhr Hamad expounds this issue in his argument that "there is a conflict between the canon that has a long and stable history and the emerging type that seeks to find a new and constant place by means of forms which bypass the old molds and establish new ones" (2017:285).

This ongoing conflict between the traditional and old-fashioned on the one hand and the new type that hinges on the formal innovation and stylistic dexterity and freshness on the other can be felt through the works of many Arab poets such as Badr Shakir Al Sayyab (1926-1964), Abdulwahhab Al Bayyati (1926-1999), Salah Abdul Sabour (1931-1981), Amal Dunqal (1940-1983), Mahmoud Al Breikan (1931-2002), Ahmed Abul Mu'ti Hijazi (b.1935), Muhammad Afifi Mattar (1935-2010), Ali Ahmad Said (Adonis) (b.1940) and many others. All these have contributed, each in his own characteristic way, in disseminating a new sensibility and a new perception of writing that is based on making use of devices derived from adjacent arts and disciplines such as plastic arts, the theatre, the cinema, music, anthropology, history, philosophy, myths

and even eschatology. This interaction between poetry and other fields proves to be very useful in expanding the horizons and potentialities of poetry and making it flexible enough to accommodate the visions and views swarming in the poet's mind.

Poet Hijazi belongs to the countryside in the south of Egypt (Manoufia) whose life permeated his thinking and views of life. All this will be disrupted the moment he finds himself in Cairo, the city that has no heart, as he titles one of his volumes of verse. Throughout his relatively long career, Hijazi has published a number of volumes of verse: *madeenabilaqalb* (City without Heart) (1959); *Uras* (1959); *lam yabqaillaali'etrafi* (Nothing Remains except Confession) (1983); *ashjaralis-mint* (Cement Trees) (1989); *talalalwaqt* (Ruins of Time) (2011). Hijazi won a number of awards and prizes such as the Konstantinos Kavavis Award (Greece), 1989; the African Poetry Award (1996); State appreciation Award (1997) and others.

Out of this brief sketch of his experiences and professional, it is quite obvious that one experience remains traumatic and ineradicable in his life: it is the compulsory shift from the simple countryside mode of life to the clamorous world of the metropolitan (Cairo). Indeed this is a turning-point in his life and a very decisive factor in the orientation of his cultural standpoint and perception of things. In other words, his poems from that moment onwards will be colored by this shocking impact of the urban on his hyper-sensitive soul. It is the influential Egyptian critic Raja al Naqqash that brings home this radical change in Hijazi's writing and thinking: "This volume of verse (*City without Heart*) (1959) represents his shift from the romantic vision of life to the realistic one" (Dar Al Hayat News). A deep analysis of many of his poems shows that it is at work in his judgments and perceptions of the city and its labyrinthine world. The first poem to be discussed in the current study exemplifies this state expressly and impressively as will be shown in due course. Hijazi has a definite and constant conception of poetry and its role in life, a point that will be a matter of heated dispute, if not outright animosity. Here the name of the great poet and thinker, Abbas Mahmoud Al Aqqad (1889-1964) looms high above this particular point as he represents the conservative spirit while Hijazi belongs rightly to the new and innovative. The dispute between the two men engrossed Hijazi's mind for a long time, even though Al Aqqad has been dead for more than half a century. In an interview recently held with Hijazi, he identifies the real reason of the dispute between the two men in Al Aqqad's firm conservative stand against free verse and its faddish stratagems as the latter thinks. A good example of this ceaseless animosity between the two men is felt when Al Aqqad knew that Hijazi and Salah Abdul Sabour will participate in the poetry festival in Damascus in 1961, he suggested that they should be prevented from doing so as their poetry in his view is devoid of the real spirit of poetry. Thus the two poets after arriving in Damascus found themselves unable to deliver their poems simply because the general secretary of the council (Yousuf Al Sibaa'i) cannot refuse the recommendation of Al Aqqad. In his wrath against Al Aqqad, Hijazi wrote a fiery letter in which he stated that "Al Aqqad himself is simply a guest in our age and at the

same time he insults us" (Sabri, 2010).

The irony is that this heated controversy mounting to a great mistrust and hatred because of the conflict between what is new and old-fashioned will be reversed in Hijazi's present attitude toward the 'prose poem'. Now he professes his attitude against this unprecedented freedom from the conventions and rules of composing the poem. In fact, Hijazi disapproves these attempts of some poets of the young generation. Poet Muhammad Shuair in his book titled "Abdul Mu'ti Hijazi yunatihqaseedat alnathr (Abdul Mu'ti Hijazi Resists the Prose Poem) (Dubai: Cultural series) Qaseedat Alnathr au AlQaseeda AlKharsaa' (*The Prose Poem or the Dumb Poem*). He finds that Hijazi believes that poetry is an absolute entity, that no matter how times and places change, poetry remains invariable and absolute as it is always " (Shuair, 2008). One of the manifestations of artistic and technical newness and innovation associated with the name of Hijazi is the clustering of images that eventually impinges on the reader's mind. Moreover, as will become evident in the second section, there is a poignant sense of the dramatic whether through the internal monologues in the minds of the characters in his poems or short dialogues, and even the physical action is highlighted. Indeed in the interview with Ihab Sabri already mentioned, Hijazi acknowledges his wish to write poetic dramas in the way Abdul Sabour and Ahmed Shawqi have already done. However, he admits that he would not fulfill this objective simply because there are so many distractions in his career that he even has no time to write his own autobiography. What matters most for the current proposes of this study is that the dramatic sense is unequivocally present. Each sentence in his poem increases the dramatic sense and the increasing state of restlessness, tension and expectation. One reason behind this practice is the poet's keen realization that the "lyrical " sides of the poem are no longer valid (Al Yafi, 271). Thus he finds it apt to borrow other devices drama and the scenery along with "the stylistic repetition and the parallelism between the visual and audible" (Saleh, 44). The innovation chosen as the title of this paper lies in this uncommon emphasis laid on the skilful use of arranging the words in such a way that the auditor or reader of these poems gradually recognizes and visualizes the different situations and snapshots the poet depicts.

SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

The significance of the present study lies in the fact that it seeks to explore the technical and linguistic innovations in Hijazi's poetry by means of choosing three representative poems and subjecting them to analysis in search of the success of the devices used in crystallizing the poet's objectives.

METHODOLOGY

The methods used throughout the present study are both descriptive and analytical in that the three poems chosen here will be seen and judged according to their linguistic and structural tools and their final impact on the reader or the beholder.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Jayyusi's (1978) contextualizes Hijazi's type of poetry within the Arabic version of romanticism. Even though the entire movement is thoroughly European in theory and practice, the Arabic version represented by Hijazi's practices proved its distinction and particularity. Aljayyusi cogently argues, Hijazi's poetry "refers to a new sense of wonder, and the yearning toward seemingly unattainable aspirations. It gives birth to a poetry of volition, of individual longings and dreams of a deep desire and freedom" (p.5).

Abbass's (1992) stresses the significant role played by the village in orienting Hijazi's consciousness as regards the stark contrast between life in the village and that in the city. As the researcher suggests, "Hijazi recognized the village after he lived in the city, as he depicts the latter and highlights its evils, i.e. entirely missing the virtues and merits of the village" (p.99).

Khalil's (2003) elaborates the reasons of discontent which surface in Hijazi's early poems about Cairo's hostile environment as seen through the eyes of the countryside young man (Hijazi) in his first traumatic experiences in this terrifying world. He goes on to say that:

The competition among the well-to-do reaches a high level. Amidst these contradictions, the place of the poet, artist and educated gets less. He does not feel his individual presence before those huge waves of people. Ahmed Hijazi describes Cairo of the 1950s as a place of the loss in its overcrowded streets where he finds himself groping his way like a bird moving among flocks of birds of prey. (p.280)

Al Manasra's (2007) raises the question of the technical innovation in Hijazi's poetry with the poet in an interview held with him. Hijazi's comment on the reasons behind that centres on the relationship with the romantic trend and its aftermath:

It actually started after the romantic trend dwindled either through the death of its major practitioners or when they ceased writing romantic poetry. This crisis appeared in the middle of the twentieth century. It was at this time that the first attempts to innovate poetry began in Iraq at the hands of the pioneers Badr Al Sayyab, Nazik Al Malaika and Abdulwahhab Al Bayyati. Then Egypt followed this procession simply because it suffered from the same social and cultural problems that were present at that time. (pp.530-31)

Al Ramoti's (2009) concentrates on the formidable effect of Arab culture on Hijazi's poetry, in particular the recurrent image of the Sindbad, the traditional image of travel and restlessness. He argues in this way:

The relation between literature-poetry- and tradition is an old one. So tradition has become a significant and rich source for many creative writers who found in it the fountainhead for their poetic visions. Such visions basically reflect the concerns and cares of man as well as reality which is interlinked with the past. In Hijazi's words, "the present with all its ambitions and failures is also reflected in poetry. By means of poetry or dream the poet seeks to construct the future.

Farahat's (2009) further explores Hijazi's striking attitude toward the city and its hostile presence in his poems.

The ongoing changes in the size and shape of the city are key factors in Hijazi's conception of Cairo and the gnawing sense of alienation and impersonality:

The modern Arab poet has felt that the construction and reality of his city has changed forever due to the invasion of the European city of their own cities. They felt that they (cities) are out of tune with their grim reality. Thus the poet's work has become an expression of the sense of estrangement. The city appears to be devoid of all human sense. What exasperates the poet's situation is his inability to escape this place. Even woman's love becomes bitter. As Hijazi states, "It is too late for love" as he admits in his volume titled, *Nothing remains except confession* (pp.75-76)

Abdulhaleem's (2014) refers to Hijazi's assessment of the famous poet, Nizar Qabbani, as illuminating since it implicitly shows Hijazi's own priorities and poetic purposes and interests. As he states, "Qabbani is a real poet who has got his own diction, apart from his courage in terms of selection of topics and language, even though he sometimes he goes too far in his last poems." www. Misralarabia.com

Hijazi's (2015) refers to his frequent discussions of his own poetic experiments and his grappling with the linguistic medium and visions. He boasts about his capacity to write poems the time and way he chooses, counter to the arguments of contemporary theorists and critics in this field. "I was not away from poetry", admits Hijazi, "nor was it from me. A poet like me has the experience to sit and write and invoke poetry within a short time. However, I prefer not to write the poem unless it forces itself on me and becomes inescapable like an interesting and fine predestination" www. Aljazeera.net

Al Bazi'ei's (2016) presents Hijazi's appreciation of the craft of poetry and its therapeutic and sublimating effects. As in the case of many cases of many creative writers all over the world, Hijazi asserts that his life is completely interlinked with poetry, "Poetry is not merely a must; rather it is, along with love, our last resort and hope in a world heaped up with hatred and squalor." www.aawasat.com

Marwan's (2018) essay recapitulates Hijazi's firm faith in the strong position poetry rightly occupies in the present cultural scene in the Arab world. Counter to the recurrent views that emphasize the overwhelming role of prose fiction at the expense of poetry, Hijazi is quoted here to be saying that:

We must know what differentiates poetry from other adjacent literary genres. Poetry is the first language because the language before being prose or science and philosophy, it was poetry. All people participated in this language as they were expressing their thoughts in terms of pattern and imagery. www. middle-east-online.com/?id:266927

DISCUSSION

The first example and perhaps one of the oldest poems is his *ana wa almadeena* (I and the City) (1959,5). The title chosen here is teleological in the sense that it refers the inevitability of fleeing the subversive effects of the city life on the individual. It is apt to recall the date of publication of this poem as it indicates unequivocally that his age at that time was only twenty four. Indeed the whole volume registers the

poet's first intimidating encounter with a big city (Cairo) that will resonate in his mind and consciousness for a long time. After presenting the individual (the helpless speaker), the poem gives the setting of the urban life which succeeds in dwarfing and even eradicating him. The setting here is of prime importance in showing the uncontrollable and sinister power of its material and lifeless presence. Moreover, the time chosen here is in line with the terrifying image of the poem. It is midnight and the speaker has been expelled from his rented room for failing to pay the monthly rent. In this agony, there is nobody to consult or support the speaker except a watchman who seems to be doubting the speaker's intents at that late hour.

(hadha ana) This is I هذا أنا

(And this is my city) wa hadhihi madeenati وهذه مدينتي

(at midnight) inda intisaf al leil عند انتصاف الليل

rahabat almedan wa aljudran tel والجدران تل

(The vastness of the square and the walls are a hill)

tabeen wa takhtafi wara'a tel تبيين وتختفي وراء تل

(disappear behind a hill) They appear and

وريقه في الريح دارت ثم حطت ثم ضاعت في الدروب

wureiqa fi alreeh darat thumma hattat thumma dha'at fi alduroob

(A leaflet circulated in the wind, then fell down and vanished in the routes)

(A shadow dissolves) dhil yadhoob ظل يذوب

yamtad dhil (A shadow stretches) يمتد ظل

wa ein misbah fidholi mumal وعين مصباح فضولي ممل

(And the eye of a tedious obtrusive lamp)

distu ala shua'ih lamma marrart دست على شعاعه لما مررت

wajasha wijdani bimaqta'a hazeen وجاش وجداني بمقطع حزين

(I felt inside me a melancholic tune coming out)

bad'atahu thumma sakattu بداته ثم سكت

(I started it, then I refrained)

man anta...man anta? من انت يا من انت؟

(Who are you...Oh, who are you?)

alharis alghabi la ya' hikayati الحارس الغبي لا يعي حكاياتي

(The tactless watchman is not aware of my story)

(Today I was kicked out) laqad turudtu alyom لقد طردت اليوم

(of my room) min ghurfati من غرفتي

wa surtu dhaian bidon ism وصرت ضائعاً بدون اسم

(I have become lost and nameless)

(hadha ana) This is I هذا أنا

(And this is my city) wa hadhihi madeenati ويتن يد مدهو

This poem is an early example of Hijazi's poetry in that it belongs to the realistic mode of writing. The mounting streak of sorrow which will be the hallmark of his poetry and helplessness is strongly felt in every line here. Critic Boullata comments on this outstanding trait of Hijazi's verse and finds that "it stems from a tragic conception of life, from an understanding of being as a continuous conflict in which man is eternally making sacrifices" (Boullata, XI). The theme of the individual alienation and estrangement is self-evident and needs no further elaboration. Indeed the poem does not capitalize on myths or allusions in conveying its message. Even so, it distinguishes itself from the language of prose, particularly the striking succession of images that eventually constitutes a scene the viewer or reader does not fail to see

or visualize. One of the devices used in this poem is the skilful use of the monologue and perceiving things through the gloss of the bewildered and woe-ridden speaker who might represent the alter ego of the poet himself at a certain moment in his life. In an interview held with the poet, he confirms this impression when he admits that "Cairo at that time was in my view a hostile city to man that constructs itself on his shreds. You will find in my earlier poetry innocence, violence and the escalating power of what is mechanical, artificial and industrial" (Abdulwahab, 74). Indeed such is the success of the discourse of the poem in evoking the pitiable state of the speaker that all objects in this scene along with its people begin to typify the inner melancholic and helpless state of the speaker. A striking image in the poem is the leaflet that is carried by the wind and eventually falls on the ground becomes the objective correlative of the status of the speaker. He is eventually homeless as he has no money to pay for his room and consequently he is a lost figure whose identity is unknown, a point emphasized by the watchman's unanswerable question "Who are you?" Indeed the question of identity and man as presence becomes dubious and dampened by the indifferent and intimidating city. The anonymity is definitely man's lot in the dismissive world of the city. Critic Ihsan Abbass expounds the wide-ranging implications of the speaker's situation in the poem in stating that it is typical of the urban life, "His situation refers to the alienation and dreary life so that the individual because of the great sense of isolation finds himself unwilling even to salute anybody else" (Abbass, 98).

This terrifying image of the city is not confined to Hijazi's presentation here. Already other modernists in different parts of the Arab world offer their own versions of the same topic. For instance, Badr Al Sayyab views the city in similar terms where man is actually choked by its maze (1960, 11):

wa taltaf hawli duroob almadeena وتلتف حولي دروب المدينة

(The routes of the city wrap around me)

hibalan min lataan yamdhagnaqalbi

(Clay ropes that eat my heart out)

wa ya'teena min jamratin feehi teena ويعطيين من جمرة فيه طينة

(They give clay out of embers within it)

hibalan min alnar yajladna uri alhuqool

حبالاً من النار يجلدن عري الحقول

(Ropes of fire flagellating the nakedness of the farms)

Adonis, likewise, perceives the city's image (2011, 5) as similar to an inferno that

is not different from Dante's:

(Now) alaan الان

(Wherever I go) aynama tawajjht اينما توجهت

aranafsi fi almadeena -- iyyaha ارى نفسي في المدينة—اياها

(I see myself in the city—itself)

tartatem aynai bi al talasem ترطم عيناى بالطلاسم

(My eyes impinge on talismans)

(My feet impinge) qadamaiy tartatem ترطم قدماى

fi nar ta'oom ala alma'a في نار تعوم على الماء

(in fire floating on water)

fi ma'a ya'oom ala alnar في ماء يعوم على النار

(in water floating on fire)

The last words in Hijazi's poem can be rightly considered as the rationale of the state of helplessness and agony prevailing throughout this memorable scene. Moreover, the link between the speaker and his habitat is emphasized in the cyclic structure of the poem so that this intolerable place becomes the individual's inevitable lot. The example given here shows an unmistakable romantic flair that highlights the undeniable and unspeakable realities of life. An explication for this is provided by scholar Salma Jayyusi in her comment on the particular version of romanticism adopted by the modern and contemporary Arab poets. As she argues, "There is no similarity here with the general sweep of Romanticism over Europe [...]. The Arab world had no intercourse the countries with which it shared some basic cultural concepts and values" (p.369). Obviously the Arabic version of romanticism lacks the cultural implications one comes across in Europe. Here the poet is content with highlighting the state of antagonism associated with the urban life and a sense of nostalgia for the countryside life and natural pleasures.

II

This section of the present study is devoted to shedding light on the technical dimensions and manifestations in two of Hijazi's mature poems that eventually show a sort of balance between the lyrical and dramatic in his work. The first, and perhaps, the outstanding and most quotable example in all his poetry is the superb poem, *marthiyyat La'ib al cir* (Elegy of the Circus Acrobat). It describes a rare example in the world of the circus that basically hinges on exceptional skill, surprise and great sense of wonder. As suggested by its very title, the poem is not concerned with the reception of the show, the reactions of the spectators as they watch such breath-taking performance and thrilling movements. Rather, it revolves around the agent of this thrilling scene of surprise and what risks and challenges he faces daily in his bitter-sweet craft. The fact of the matter is that some researchers tend to see the poem from a biographical viewpoint in that it reflects the poet's own ordeal, rather than the objective he. Indeed this is the gist of the argument raised by the Iraqi scholar, Shawqi Yousuf Bahnam who argues to this effect in his thesis titled "Hijazi wa ahjan albahlawan...rou'ya nafsiyya" (Hijazi and the Sorrows of the Circus Acrobat...A Psychological Perspective" (Al Qee'i, 2016). The justification for such speculations and views is associated with Hijazi's own prophetic insights and apprehensions and bitterness at what might occur in the hectic days of June, 1967. A whole volume of verse is devoted to elegies to the by-gone days, among these, is this poem which depicts the resounding failure of a very skilled man and its deplorable effects.

There is nearly a general consent among critics and scholars of Hijazi's poetry that 'Elegy of the Circus Acrobat' (1966) is the best of his work which he could not surpass in the poems following it. Contemporary Egyptian critic Salah Fadhl praises the poem lavishly as a testimony of an entire generation that has become at last disillusioned, "Elegy of the Circus Acrobat" remains one of the most refined and powerful expressions of the poet in that period." (2015,5). The particularity of this poem can be felt through its conscious attempt to eschew all biographical touches which

have become a catch phrase for the specialists addressing Hijazi's poetic achievement. It is objective par excellence as it deals with a profession beset by all types of risks and temptations. The glamour of the scene and the applause of the spectators along with the dazzling lights of the scene are irresistible for those involved in its alluring world. In short it is a world of elation, self-assertion and showing off one's matchless skills. For all these merits and uncommon traits, the circus world has its own impending dangers since those who climb the ropes and swing themselves at the top of the tent are most vulnerable to the catastrophe. This is because there is no protection whatsoever in the event of an unexpected fall of the acrobat. In western canon there are artistic works devoted to showing the fine sides of a particular craft or sport and its other ignoble aspects as seen in Hemingway's non-fiction, *Death in the Afternoon*. Spain's Andalusian poet Federico Garcia Lorca lamented the bloody goring of the matador Ignacio Sanches Mejias in the Lament devoted to him. The emphasis is laid on the bloody sides of this profession:

I will not see it

Tell the moon to come,

For I do not want to see the blood of Ignacio on the sand.

The moon wide open, horse of still clouds, and the grey bull ring of dreams with willows in the barreras. (Lorca, 137)

As already suggested, 'Elegy of the Circus Acrobat' refers to the pleasure/pain duality embedded in this uncommon type of show where the poem describes the nameless acrobat and what permeates the character as he is subjected every evening to the most hazardous situations. Hijazi's view about poetry and its role is worth-quoting at some length as it intensifies the great interest in this particular poem. He is quoted to be saying that:

The poet does not merely tell us that we are going to die, but also he identifies this tragic experience and embodies it graphically [...]. Poetry is a comprehensive knowledge because it is a comprehensive language that addresses all our senses simultaneously. It is a series of nouns and adjectives, images and references, thoughts and rhythms [...]. It is an open and intimate knowledge that addresses all of us. It is not partial like science nor abstract like philosophy. (Aldeek, 2007, p.47)

Moreover, it states that in such a game it stipulates the player should not commit any error as the rules of the game forbid such a thing and would eventually lead to perdition. Thus the prologue of the poem has this foreboding tone when the reader comes across the following:

fi al aalam almamloo' akhtaa في العالم المملوء اخطاء

(In this world that is full of errors)

mutalabun wahdak alla takhtiaa مطالبون وحدك لا تخطئنا

(You are the only one that should not err)

(liana jismakalnaheel لان جسمك النحيل

(Because your slender body)

lau maratan asra'a au abta'a لومرة اسرعا وابطنا

(If for once gets faster or slower)

hawa wa saqat aala alardh ashla'a هوى وسقط على الارض اشلاء

(Crushes... and falls to pieces on the ground)

The speaking voice in this initial speech or prologue does not belong to the player himself nor does it represent the

feelings of the expectant spectators that are fully engrossed and thrilled by the fascinating performance. It is the voice of reason which tries to rationalize this dangerous game, irrespective of its immediate thrill and brilliance. Interestingly, the addressee here is not the reader, actual or imaginary, although he/she remains the target of all these assumptions. The one ostensibly addressed is the nameless acrobat that embodies the poem's main topic, i.e., tragic death amidst the glaring lights. This is intensified by the sinister refrain that is repeated thrice in the poem (herein lies the significance of the repetition in Hijazi's art):

fi aya lailatin yaqa' dhalaka alkhata'a
في اي ليلة يقع ذلك الخطأ؟

(In which night does that error happen?)

The mounting tension in the poem is accentuated by the careful selection of diction that gradually leads to the inescapable end. Significantly enough, the fatal conclusion of the poem is not the result of any fault on the part of the acrobat. Rather it is a tragic moment of the carelessness of the personnel working in the technical team. The description of the ropes under the acrobat's feet suggests that, even though his end could happen for other reasons just like death in ordinary human life. The line that suggests this catastrophic moment is:

تنبض تحتك الحبال مثلما تنبض رامي وتره

tanbidh tahtak alhibal mithlama anbadha rami watarah
(The ropes vibrate under you as does the archer his chord)

The paradox occurs at the end, after the acrobat succeeds in presenting a very dazzling scene where his skill is its highest:

wa anta tubdi fannak almur'ib aala'I wa aala'I وانت تبدي وفنك المرعب الاء والاء

فنتك المرعب الاء والاء

(And you display all sorts of your macabre art)

تستوقف الناس امام اللحظة المدمره

tastawqif amama allahdha almudammira

(You keep people amazed before this fatal moment)

wa anta fi manazil almut talaju تلج منازل الموت

عابنا مجترنا

aabia'an mujtari'an

(And you break into the places of death, careful and daring)

وانت تقلت الحبال للحبال

l wa anta tufit alhibal lilhibal

(And you move from one to another)

tarakta malja'an wama adrakta maljaan تركت ملجا وما دركت

بعد ملجا

(You have left a shelter and have not reached another)

فيجمد الرعب على الوجوه لذة واشفاقا واصغاء

fa yajmad alru'b ala al wujooh ladhatan wa ishfaqaan wa isgha'an

(Terror seizes the faces with pleasure, pity and silence)

The unanswerable question that keeps haunting the reader of the poem, or the perceiver of the text, for that matter, is the peculiar relationship tying the acrobat to the spectators. It is a relation that combines all sorts of admiration, suspense and fear for his safety. The possibility of such an event could put an end to all the great ceremony held every night for highlighting the achievement of the circus player. It will be totally different from the normal routine and ritual of the circus: inertia will replace the graceful and dangerous movements and the darkness will prevail, putting an end for many wonderful times. This inevitable moment is described

in such connotative phrases that they inevitably transcend the present situation and begin to acquire universal and timeless dimensions:

في اي ليلة ترى يقع ذلك الخطأ؟
في اي ليلة ترى يقع ذلك الخطأ؟

(In which night does the error occur?)

في هذه الليلة او في غيرها من الليال

fi hadhihi al lailati au fi ghairiha min al layali

Is it tonight, or any other night?)

حين يغيض في مصابيح المكان نورها

heena yaghehth fi masabeeh alماكن nooraha

(When the light of the lamps of the place fades)

watantafi' (and extinguishes)

في اي ليلة ترى يقع ذلك الخطأ؟
في اي ليلة ترى يقع ذلك الخطأ؟

(In which night does that error occur?)

ويسحب الناس صياحهم

wayashab alnas siyyahahum

(People stop their yelling)

على مقدمك المفروش

اضواء

(At your advent surrounded by light)

حين تلوح مثل فارس يجيل الطرف في مدينته

Heena taloohu mithal faris yujeel altarf fi madeenatihi

(When you appear like a knight casting a glance at his city)

مودعا يطلب ود الناس في صمت نبيل

muwadi'aan...yatlibu wid alnas fi samt nabeel

(Saying farewell...appealing to the affection of people in noble silence)

ثم تسير نحو اول الحبال مستقيما مؤمنا

thumma taseer nahwa awal alhibal mustaqeeman....
mu'minan

(Then you head to the first rope, upright and faithful)

وهم يدقون على ايقاع خطوط الطبول

wahum yadhqqoon ala eiyqa'a khatwaka altubool

(And they keep on drumming in line with the rhythm of your pace)

ويملأون الملعب الواسع ضوضاء

wayamla'oon almala'ab alwasi' dhawdha'an

(The spacious playground resonates with their clamor)

ثم يقولون ابديا

thumma yaqooloon ibtadi'

(Then they say: Begin)

في اي ليلة ترى يقع ذلك الخطأ؟

في اي ليلة ترى يقع ذلك الخطأ؟
في اي ليلة ترى يقع ذلك الخطأ؟

In these two stanzas of the poem, Hijazi juxtaposes between the actual and imaginary, the spectators who seek their money's worth of a fine show of brilliance and skill and an acrobat who is preordained as in Greek tragic heroes. As the different details of the poem are furnished, one begins to see the whole scene from another angle as the similarity between the acrobat of the poem and the position of the poet narrating this moving tale becomes conspicuous. The two are artists in their own characteristic ways: the former (acrobat) uses the physical and gymnastic in extracting the various reactions of the spectators while the latter (the poet) uses the verbal art in creating the moments of excessive pleasure and admiration. However, the acrobat's art is more appealing and attracts all slices, ages and genders in society while the poet like Hijazi

himself can only appeal to the elite and sophisticated as he deliberately shifts from the traditional and established type of poetry. In other words, the poem, as already stated, is objective in its vivid exploration of the ordeal of a man whose way of earning his living is that of a rigorous and hazardous strife. His fall could happen at any moment and it is this very moment that the present poem elucidates. In contrast, the poet's block or lack of creativity is less resounding and less grave.

The climactic moment in the poem, of course, comes as a natural outcome of this careful and calculated cumulative power of the details of both human and non-human, agent and spectators. The poem shows and concretizes what goes on in this world and its formidable impacts. After those snapshots where narration and dramatization go hand in hand, the poem presents its final resolution. It is the resounding collapse of the acrobat and the concomitant death. The poet renders this end in a way that holds a sort of revelation and a vague sense of salvation where the daily strife now finds its long-awaited end, albeit a terrifying one:

تنغرس الصرخة في الليل كما طوح لص خنجره

tangarus alsarkhatu fi alleil kama tawuaha lisun khinjarah
(The scream pierces the night as a thief does his own dagger)

ثم تعود مستقرا هادئا

thumma ta'ood hadia'an mustaqirran
(Then you return pacified and balanced)

تبتسم في وجه الملا

tabassam fi wajhalmalaa
(You smile at people)

كانما عرفت اشياء

ka'innama arifta ashya'a wa saddaqt alnaba'a
اشياء وصدقت النبيا

(As if you knew things and believed the tidings)

What is striking about this poem is the perspective used in handling this very popular game and making it carry more comprehensive and universal levels of signification. It is a reminder that the dazzling success and glaring lights of fame conceal the opposite that might occur at any moment once the caution gets less and the individual's self-trust transcends the rational limits. However, the poem exerts great efforts to concretize the notion of death which is of course the main issue in the entire poem. Here only the metaphoric and archetypal imagery could save the situation and succeed in crystallizing this central point in the poem:

ليقتل اراظتنا رجي تم لظلا يف لكتحت ادمم

mumaddadan tahtak fi ald hulma yajiru intidharahu alth-
aqeel

(It is stretched below you in the darkness, putting up with its burdensome waiting.)

كانه الوحش الخرافي الذي ما روضت كف بشر

kainnahu alwahsh alkhurafi alladhi ma rawuathathu kaf
bashar

(It is like the fabulous monster that a human hand cannot tame)

فهو جميل (It is pretty)

jameelfa huwa (It is pretty) ...kainnahu altawoos ...jadhbab kalifa'a
كانه الطاووس. جذاب

كافعي

(It looks like the peacock.enticing like a serpent)

(and graceful like a tiger)wa rasheeq kal nimir
ورشيق كالنمر وهو جليل

wahuw ajaleel ((and magnificent

كالاسد الهاديء ساعة الخطر
kal asad alhadi'a sa'at alkhatar

(Like the calm lion at the moment of danger)

wahuwa mukhatel...fa yabdoon na'iemana
وهو مختال. فيبدو

(It is deceitful...as it feigns sleep)

وهو يعد نفسه للوثبه المستعرة

wa huwa ya'idu nafsahu lil wathbah almustai'ra

(while he prepares himself for the blazing leap)

It seems that the poem casts an illuminating light on this eternal duality informing the very existence of human life: the atmosphere of youth, power, glory and magic is always yoked with the power of destruction undermining all these ambitious enterprises. Definitely, this is a time-honored topic but its treatment linguistic the technical devices used throughout confer upon it depth and comprehensiveness and relevance.

If "Elegy of the Circus Acrobat" concentrates on the acrobat's tragic lot and its great implications and the fresh perspective through which his situation is perceived, Hijazi's presentation of "thalj"(Snow) follows the same strategy in defamiliarizing this common phenomenon in the west and some regions in the east. One common feature between the former one and "Snow" is that the pleasure and admiration it stirs in the viewers is doomed to finish in no time. The acrobat's astounding show is doomed to end in fiasco and horrendous death. Here the evanescence of the experience of snow and its brief presence is once again a reminder of the poet's melancholic view that all the fine people and things in this world usually have a very short term to live and they soon vanish. It also has the same technical strategy in that the poem depends on action and motion as the poet's alter ego celebrates the advent of snow and all its associations of regeneration, grace and beauty. The treatment of this natural object(snow) embodies Hijazi's concept of poetry and its modern function. As he is quoted to be saying:

Poetry is life and our life is poetry. Poetry is in danger because love is in danger, because joy is in danger. Man has forsaken his utopias that he has been envisioning for a long time only to no avail. He has become desperate of resisting misery when he surrendered to the emperors of post-modernism and followed their track. (Al Deek, 46)

"Snow"(1978) is once again a reminder that there a residue of the romantic bent he has begun his career with. This natural phenomenon is presented here in certain terms and images that evoke all the sensations linked with ardent love. One of the factors that helps in intensifying his vision and uncommon handling of this topic is perhaps, explained through the diverse relations he made while staying in France (between 1974 and 1990)" with some scholars, poets and translators"(Abdulwahhab,71) and the invigorating effects all this had on his writing and its content. Thus it is possible to say that Hijazi's career followed a consistent and homogenous line. Until recently he has been the Editor-in-Chief of the quarterly, *Ibdaa* (Creativity), devoted to the proliferation and boosting of contemporary poetry in the Arab world.

Given his innate romantic flair, it is expected to find that Hijazi's response is highly passionate, emotive and festive as he pays homage to this unexpected visitor (snow). Hijazi's poem has a striking start in its emphasis on the 'surprising'

advent of the snow and the substantial changes it has brought about, in particular the dazzling whiteness:

ما جافم ضايبل ا
(Whiteness is a surprise)
يتذفان تيرع نيح
(When I removed the rolling shutter of my window)
(I was awakened) shaddani
شادنني من يمانم في دنلا
(I was awakened from my sleep by the flake of the snow)
alladhi kana yahtulmuta' idan
(That was dropping slowly)
متعاصرن عيش لك احنام
(Conferring its luster on everything)
wa madahu alshafeef
(and its transparent purview)
kanna dwuama min rafeef
(It was a vortex of shimmering)
(It induced me) jadhabatni laha
اول ين تبذج
(So we went together) farahnama'an
اعم انل حرف
(And we set out together) wa intalaqna ma'an
اعم انقلطن اوان
لظريغ نم فرفرن
(Fluttering without a shadow)
wanarqus beina alsa'oud wa alhobout
نبي صقرون و
طوبلنا نيبو دو عصلنا
(we dance, rising and falling)
(The grass haunts us) alishbu yurawiduna
اندواري بش ع
(And the leafless shrubs) wa alshujeirat alaraya
ايارعنا تاري جشلاو
wa mutaka'at alnawafed wa alshurufat
ذفاونل تاىكتم و
تافرشلناو
(and the cushions of windows and balconies)
wa aydi alsighar wa aydi altamatheel
يدي و راغصلنا يدي و
لي ثامتلا
(and the hands of children and statues)
wa alka'inat almutallah hawla alsuqoof
قلطملا تانئالكلاو
فوقسلا لوح
(and the creatures around the roofs)
bayadhan taqqallaba fi dhatihi
متاذ يف بلقت اضايبي
(Whiteness that turned around itself)
karufoof min albaja'at
(Like flocks of swans)
(on water spring) ala nab' ma
عام عبن لى اع
Yamsahna shubata anaqihin altiwal
نوقان عا تبمش نحس مي
لاوطلا
(They rub the grayness of their tall necks)
ala reesh ajsadahuna alwareef
فيريولنا مداس جاشيري
(against the long feathers of their bodies)
thumma ashraqat alshams min fawqana
شمشلا تقرشا دث
انقوف نم
(Then the sun rose above us)
(So we fell together) fa saqatna ma'an
اعم انطقس ف
(and we got dissolved together) wa inhalalna ma'an
اعم انل لحن او
fi ratabat alsawad alaleef
فيلالا داوسلا تباتر ي
(in the dullness of the familiar blackness)

Structurally speaking, the poem comprises 27 lines that elaborate two dualities. The first is the white/black duality which is self-evident as can be seen through the succession of images in the poem to be followed by the last three lines,

i.e., the resolution when the reverie is over and all the euphoria dissipates. The irony in this peculiar position is that the viewer's joy finishes when the sun rises although he was not dreaming as the beginning of the poem clearly shows. The sunrise is usually considered by all people to bring feelings of content and a powerful sense of regeneration. However, in this particular situation, the opposite is true as the speaker in the poem is unwilling to be brought back to his daily routine.

The other duality is that of flying and emancipation from all trammels and entanglements versus the return to daily reality and its discontents. In this poem, there is no need for 'a wintry mind' to recognize what it means to be cold as Wallace Stevens' poem "The Snow Man" affirms. Here it is the other way around. This unexpected presence (snow) provides a rare opportunity for the speaker to see life from a fresh angle. Also it opens up new vistas of experience that he has not hitherto known. It is a thrilling, albeit brief, interval between two poles of ordinariness: a celebration of life and its energizing and sustaining capacities and the inevitable habituation that sets in. Hence the presence of words like 'vortex', 'going together', 'setting out together', 'dancing', 'rising', 'falling' which in entirety indicates a sense of motion, union, intimacy and a passionate, if not erotic, situation.

The poem indicates that the imagination is kindled now and the body's latent desires are awakened and activated. The scattered references to the sensual and physical are related to Hijazi's own understanding of the act of writing that resembles a sexual act. Elsewhere he is quoted to be saying that "the poet reveals the identity of writing through a physical act. It is marked by vitality and friction between two hot bodies where the body of woman/writing is disclosed" (Hijazi, 1992:33). The bodily references or suggestions embedded in "The Snow" are artistically and thematically justified since they intensify the state of ecstasy ensuing as a result of the purifying and regenerating power of the snow. This type of argument inescapably brings to mind Roland Barthes's argument about the inextricability between writing and female body when he states, "Bliss, or jouissance, is precisely that place where the subject loses him/herself, where language breaks down; jouissance cannot be spoken" (Locey, 21). In Hijazi's case, sometimes the use of sexuality lacks this artistic and technical reasoning and sometimes becomes gratuitous, a mere act of self-indulgence. The teleological use of sexuality is often absent in some of his poems as seen in his pornographic poem "kan li qalb" (Once I Had a Heart).

The scene of snow has stirred a sense of surprise in the speaker's consciousness. All the negative effects of winter are kept at bay and the emphasis is laid on the dream-like state invoked by the fall of the snow. Of course this is not an ordinary dream because the poem states unequivocally that the speaker is now awake. However the ethereal pleasure associated with the snow puts the speaker in this uncommon dreamlike state. It is a plea for all the senses and sentiments: adoration, elation, embracing the infinite and equilibrium between man and existence. It is a rare time when all the inhibitions and restrictions are lifted. Hence the felicitous use of "the image of the 'vortex' and all its positive meanings" (Khalil, 2002, p.88).

In the first section of the poem comprising 24 lines, the speaker appears to be in a state of ecstasy where the sense of time and place is actually suspended. The speaker finds himself driven by all sorts of sensations as he succumbs to this surprising flurry of power, activity and matchless joy. This is suggested by the emphasis laid on the 'flakes of snow', 'flickering', 'and birds', the glaring luster and the shadowless figures. However, Hijazi's poem ends in a statement that runs counter to the rest of the poem and its predominating tone of pleasure and release. The last three lines bring the reader back to the troubles of habituation and dull life. If one takes into account the fact that Hijazi belongs to the Mediterranean region and that the sight of snow is a rare experience there, the thrill and celebration accompanying its fall is not surprising. Perhaps his experiences in Paris could provide an answer to this keen representation of the snow's experience in Hijazi's poetry. What is more, the poet has gone too far as to make this short-termed situation traverse the constantly tedious life that has been the poet's lot. Hijazi's finale sheds light on the depressing and dull mode of living he has been leading on for a long time and undoubtedly this is a lyrical side which he has exerted many attempts to evade.

CONCLUSION

To sum up, Hijazi is one of the outstanding contemporary Egyptian poets who has sought throughout his relatively long creative career to record and contextualize daily events and situations which dovetail the private and public, the personal and impersonal, the explicit and implicit. Evidently Hijazi is an experienced poet whose critical insights regarding the nature and function of poetry and its strategies are equally illuminating. His type of poetry (free verse) brought him in clash with the traditional poets and prominent critics of his time like Al Aqqad simply because he chose a medium which has not established itself the first time he dabbled in poetry. His poems seem simple in their diction and deliberately keep away from the deliberate mystification in the practices of his generation. As a Marxist, he proves himself to be the voice of the many inarticulate and marginalized people. He chose to talk about situations drawn from daily reality and ordinary life: murder of a child in an indifferent habitat; a boy selling lemon amidst the huge crowds of pedestrians and cars; the individual state of utter loss and bewilderment in the urban world of high buildings and lack of fresh air and blue sky. In the three examples of his poems already discussed, it transpires that Hijazi's primary concern has got nothing to do with the metaphysical and abstract. Indeed, his task is to foreground and elucidate the here and now and the pleasures of the ordinary and common. In his striking poem, "Elegy of the Circus Acrobat", the poet is at his peak in presenting a very condensed and suggestive text which Roland Barthes would call "a scriptable". This is because there is a host of meanings emanating from it and it is the reader's task to sort out and interpret the tragic death of the 'knight' in the poem and its multiple political, historical and even artistic suggestions. All these readings would not have been possible had not the poet charged his poem with cadences and nuances which eventually endow his poem with remarkable

richness and glamour.

Hijazi is a distinguished poet who has succeeded in initiating a line of his own in terms of imagery and diction so that the discerning reader can identify the writer of the poem even though his name is not there. By means of simple and direct statements (in the original text), the author manages to make his readers or auditors (by the way, Hijazi is a very impressive speaker) mesmerized due to the succession of pictorial and visual images leading to the desired effect. It is this profound technical and artistic expertise that empowers Hijazi to present skilful works in apparently simple vocabulary. Did not William Wordsworth define the poet as simply an ordinary man speaking to men, using their language and interests in *The Lyrical Ballads* (1798)? Indeed, this is what links Hijazi to the romantic writers in addition to the symbolists of France about whom he had a first-hand experience when he worked as a teacher of Arabic for more than 15 years. Hijazi is an influential voice in contemporary Egyptian and Arabic poetry that successfully epitomized the aspirations, apprehensions and dreams of generations in critical periods of social and cultural transition. His poetry, criticism and journalism is inextricably tied to these swift and unpredictable changes in the very fabric of the Egyptian society and the Arab world at large.

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