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 perforce 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 standpoint 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 legitimat means of expressing the aspirations of people and their innermost wishes. In fact his poetry combines 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 AbulMu’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
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. Aljayyuusi 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) strengthens 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 grooping 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 reflects 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.

Farhat’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 their 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
(And this is my city) wa hadhihi madeenati
(at midnight) inda intisaf al leil
(At the vastness of the square and the walls are a hill) tabeen wa takhtafi wara’a tel
(disappear behind a hill) They appear and
(Worried in the rhythms) Traveled with them
(were circulated in the wind) wureiqa fi alreeh durat
(hatam thumma dha’at fi alduroob

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

(Al shadow dissolves)dhil yadhoob
(yamtd dlhl (A shadow dissipates)
waein misabh fidholi munmal
(And the eye of a tedious obtrusive lamp)
distu ala shua’i lamma marrartu
(wajasha wijdani bimaqta’a hazeen
(I felt inside me a melancholic tune coming out)
(bad’atuhu thumma sakattu

(I started it, then I refrained)

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

(alharis alghabi la ya’i hikayati
(The tactless watchman is not aware of my story)
(Today I was kicked out) laqad turudtu alyom
(of my room) min ghurfati

(Clay ropes that eat my heart out)

(wa surt dhaian bidon ism
(I have become lost and nameless)

(hadha ana) This is I
(And this is my city) wa hadhihi madeenati

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 skillful 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 correlate 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 hawi lduroob almadeena
(The routes of the city wrap around me)

(From the city) tabeej tarafana


(Clay ropes that eat my heart out

(And they give clay out of embers within it)

They give clay out of embers within it

(hibal min alnaran yajladna uru alhuqool

(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
(Wherever I go) yajnana tawajjih
(And I shall reach)

aranafs fi almadeena — iyyahawa
(I shall see myself in the city—itself)

tartemat aiynai bi al talasem

(My eyes impinge on talismans)

(My feet impinge) qadamaytartatatem

in fire floating on water)

fi ma’a ya’oom ala alma’a

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 cirk (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 albablawan... 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 bit-terness 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 resound of the circus world and 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 alalmalloo ‘akhtaa
(In this world that is full of errors)
matalabun wahdak alla takhtiaa
(You are the only one that should not err)
lau maratan asra’ a abta’ a
(If for once gets faster or slower)
haawa wa saaqat aala araldh asha’ a
(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’ dhala’ka alkhata’a**  
(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:

**tanbith 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  
(You appear like a knight casting a glance at his city)

People stop their yelling  
(You have left a shelter and have not reached another)

Therewith the spectators while the latter (the poet) uses the verbal art in such connotative phrases that they inevitably transcend the present situation and begin to acquire universal and timeless dimensions:

**fi aya lailatin yaqa’ dhala’ka alkhata’a**  
(Which night does that error happen?)

(Where is the turn of the scene?)

**fi aya lailatin yaqa’ dhala’ka alkhata’a**  
(Which night does that error happen?)

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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:

...then you return pacified and balanced
You smile at people
...and graceful like a tiger
He pays homage to this unexpected visitor (snow). Hijazi’s response is highly passionate, emotive and festive as if you knew things and believed the tidings. His fall could happen at any moment and it is this very moment that the present poem elucidates. In contrast, 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 beauty. 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 because love is in danger, because joy is in danger.

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 can only appeal to the elite and sophisticated as he pays homage to this unexpected visitor (snow). Hijazi’s response is highly passionate, emotive and festive as if you knew things and believed the tidings.

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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 can only appeal to the elite and sophisticated as he pays homage to this unexpected visitor (snow). Hijazi’s response is highly passionate, emotive and festive as if you knew things and believed the tidings. His fall could happen at any moment and it is this very moment that the present poem elucidates. In contrast, 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 beauty. 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 because love is in danger, because joy is in danger.

As if you knew things and believed the tidings
...then you return pacified and balanced
You smile at people
...and graceful like a tiger
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advent of the snow and the substantial changes it has brought about, in particular the dazzling whiteness:

البهش نيب دوعصلا

(Whiteness is a surprise)

heenaarratunafidhati

(When I removed the rolling shutter of my window)

(Shuddani min manami alnadeef)

(I was awakened by a vortex of shimmering)

الهتجاج نيب تابين

(We rubbed the grayness of our tall necks)

مازهبح تائفان نيب

They rub the grayness of their tall necks

تاءتاهو راقيتلا نيب

and the cushions of windows and balconies

وا جاه لامتحار

wa aiydi alsighar wa aiydi alnadeef

and the cushions of windows and balconies

(We dance, rising and falling)

(And the uselessness of shimmering)

(Shuddani min manami alnadeef)

(We rubbed the grayness of their tall necks)

(Whiteens that turned around itself)

هتاذ يف بلقت اضايب

(But the ethereal pleasure)

(And we set out together)

(And its transparent purview)

(And we set out together)

(And the transparent purview)

(And we got dissolved together)

(Shuddani min manami alnadeef)

(I was awakened by a vortex of shimmering)

(Shuddani min manami alnadeef)

(I was awakened by a vortex of shimmering)

(Shuddani min manami alnadeef)

(And we got dissolved together)

(And we got dissolved together)

(And its transparent purview)

(And the transparent purview)

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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 himself is 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-term 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 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 “one. 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 n’t 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.


