

# **Towards Universal Apocalyptic Visions— A Study in a Selection of Poems by Swift, Byron, Yeats, Al-Sayab and Abul- Qasim Al- Shabby**

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## **Abstract**

The realm of poetry is wide enough to gather together the threads which bind humanity and establish its reunion. One of those threads is the human future which preoccupies poets, the “unacknowledged legislators of the human history”, to quote Shelley here. Apocalyptic visions overstep the cultural and religious differences and become a universal concern since they seem to spring from one source and aim at the same objective.

This study is an attempt to shed light on some apocalyptic visions visualized by poets who belong to various ages and cultures. It shows that these visions are employed to dramatize those attempts which seek to uncover the vague human future.

## **(I)**

Poetry can be seen as a means that embodies the human vision which interprets the various phenomena of the universe to penetrate into the bottomless depths of existence through intuitive speculation. This sort of speculation operates on the levels of both consciousness and unconsciousness which work hard to uncover the secrets of existence and the universal phenomena. 1

On the same level, the future of humanity and the world as a whole remains a keyless mystery which the poets endlessly endeavor to solve. In fact, the human future becomes the target of poetic imagination throughout ages. It is the poetic power of the poet that becomes his semiotic expressive symbols as if it were used by a diviner to depict a prophetic vision, foretelling the future of things. This vision is a reflection of the poet's hypersensitive consciousness. It is also part of the mutual relationship between the poet and his world, on the one hand, and the poet and his consciousness on the other:

**We find ourselves flung down into the world, into a time and place we did not choose, but at the same time it is our world in so far as our consciousness projects it. 2**

In this respect, we are inevitably led to saying something about prophecy, imagination and dreams because they are closely related to each other. They can be seen as the poet's tools by which he seeks to find the truth that he wants to embody in his poetry.

They also exemplify “the complex process of interaction between the internal mind and the external world.”<sup>3</sup> This mental activity is characteristic of the prophetic or imaginative mind [which] transforms the sense-data into something new and individual through the power of its speech; [and] at this point the internal and external become mutually interactive as the spirit of the living creature.<sup>4</sup>

Prophecy is a term that has its own religious roots. It is “the divine power within man”<sup>5</sup> It is the chain that links the poetic with the holy, art with religion, and the poet with inspiration at the poetic moment. Furthermore, the Old Testament, with its symbolic stories

and religious visions, becomes an ever-lasting source material upon which the poets draw “for parallels to their own experience.”<sup>6</sup> We do not only have the Old Testament, but there is also The New Testament which represents the corner-stone in apocalyptic literature. Apocalyptic literature is defined by J.A.Cuddon as The literature of revelation, particularly of the future. The last book of The New Testament, “The Revelation of St. John” is a classic example. [It is] a work which aspires to the prophetic tone and manner... [It aims at evoking] a large number of diatribes against the wickedness of humanity and the imminence end of the world. Sermon literature abounds in apocalyptic visions.<sup>7</sup>

This definition shows that apocalyptic literature is closely related to the Bible and that it is mainly concerned with the revelation of the future.

From an Eastern religious point of view, prophecy is a new concept or a new vision of man and the universe; a vision that foretells the future. It is a combination with the unknown; a combination that creates a new image of the world or it creates the world anew.<sup>8</sup> In this way, the understanding of prophecy and vision cements the relationship between poetry and prophecy. Both are creative processes aiming at exploring the truth about the world and to foretell the future of man and the universe. In this sense, the position of the prophet-poet is firmly established at the centre of the process of poetic creativity — a process which shows the mutual interaction between poetry and prophecy.

The apocalyptic vision has a long list of fundamental characteristics. It belongs to the world of the unknown; a world of continuous change and renewal. At the same time, it is a complete separation from the physical world, a world which is monotonous and repetitious. It suddenly and rapaciously occurs, violating the common norms of causal logic.<sup>9</sup>

Dreams are also highly effective as far as the apocalyptic is concerned. J.R. Watson points out that The symbolic operation of dreams link them with the working of the poetic imagination, which can allow one thing to stand for another, and can transform abstraction into symbol.<sup>10</sup>

So far, one can see that dreams open before the poet another world which is completely different from the world of reality. It is free, beautiful, rich, holy and spiritual.

The principle of selecting Swift, Byron, Yeats, Al-Sayab and Al-Shabby is both cultural and chronological. They belong to different ages, representing various literary circles and cultures. The Eastern-Western view of the apocalyptic can also be examined since we have the examples of Al-Sayab and Abul-Qasim Al-Shabby.

## (II)

The greatest part of the critical attention paid to Jonathan Swift (1667 – 1745) focuses on him as a novelist, satirist, and ironist. It seems that his poetry, which is secondary in its importance and amount, does not receive the same critical attention as his poetry does. Swift's poetry, like the poetry of his age, characteristically reflects that The growing esteem for sentiment and feeling in the eighteenth century was the culmination of a long process — a movement toward internalization, first from the rationalistic systems of the seventeenth century to the Augustan emphasis on immediate intuition.<sup>11</sup>

"Internalization" and "immediate intuition" are two important factors upon which the apocalyptic largely depends.

Swift's life is stamped with some sort of religious orientation. He was an Anglican parish priest in northern Ireland. He was also “appointed Dean of St. Patrick's Cathedral in Dublin.”<sup>12</sup> He has many religious writings such as “An Argument Against Abolishing Christianity in England.” and “A Tale of a Tub” (a satire on religious enthusiasm).<sup>13</sup>

Swift's "The Day of Judgment" presents a horrid vision which consists of a series of images which are originally Biblical and comparable with the images used in The Revelation of St. John. The first striking image is that of the graves giving up the dead, while Jove is bursting the skies:

**A horrid vision seized my head  
I saw the graves give up their dead  
Jove, armed with terrors, burst the skies  
And thunder roars and lightning flies.<sup>14</sup>**

Then, the emphasis is shifted from the state of confusion and horror which conquer the whole world to the sinners who are pale and hanging their heads. This shift shows Swift's religious bent for a sense of commitment to straightforwardness, piety and a total rejection of frailty, pride and other vices. At the end of the poem, the poet tries to belittle the importance of "the world's mad business" which fully preoccupies people, making them forget God and the other world. Men, who deviate from the straight path, are described as "blockheads" and "fools":

**The world's mad business now is o'er  
And I resent these pranks, no more  
I to such blockheads set my wit  
I damn such fools — Go, go you're bit.**

While depending on the Bible to shape his apocalyptic vision, Swift remains faithful to the norms of his age which he clearly reflects in this poem. He relates the offending nature of the human race to their blindness and deviation from Reason and Nature: "Offending race of human kind/ By nature, reason, learning blind". Behind Swift's prophetic vision, one can feel that there is "an unbalanced rebel . . . a conscious artist, intimately involved in criticizing the manners [of everything] of his time."<sup>15</sup> His indignation against the sinfulness of man in this poem is part of "bitter attacks on general human behavior [which] are so common [in the 18th century]."<sup>16</sup>

As a religious man, Swift directs his satire to elevate the human thought and to set man above the urges of an ugly materialistic world. This is why an angry tone is conveyed in this poem. Such a tone is necessary to complete an apocalyptic vision which is dispassionately and satirically visualized by a man who represents the religious authority of the church.

In "The Day of Judgment", one can hardly find any sense of subjectivity. It seems that the poet prefers to play the role of a preacher foretelling "a horrid vision." In this sense, the absence of subjectivity becomes a necessary requirement for the poet to fulfill his message as a Dean, not an ordinary man. This utter absence of subjectivity is to be compared with Byron's in his poem "Darkness" and sharply contrasted with Al-Sayab's overwhelming subjectivity in "A Prophecy and Vision".

At the same time, one can see that Swift's vision is dominated by his belief in the doctrine of original sin. He thinks that the human nature is a corrupt nature and in need for divine grace.<sup>17</sup>

### (III)

Byron's preoccupation with the apocalyptic is part of his interest as one of the Romantic poets who have a strong bent to use their imagination which "enjoys a creative freedom which it consciously seeks to exploit, either for the revelation of spiritual truth . . . or purely for excitement and wonder."<sup>18</sup> In his book, *Byron: A Survey*, Bleckstone points out that

Speculations on the origin, nature and destiny of man are, of course, important factors in Byron's] Biblical drama [and] they also motivate a number of non-dramatic and non-lyrical poems.<sup>19</sup>

In fact, the Romantic Age witnesses a profound interest in the apocalyptic. The idea of Byron's "Darkness" essentially belongs to Shelley's reference in 1816 to "a sublime but gloomy theory that this earth . . . will at some future period be changed into a mass of frost."<sup>20</sup>

A close reading of "Darkness" shows that Byron's apocalyptic vision is a typical romantic one in which the poet successfully depicts an image of the Romantic poet's way of thinking concerning the human condition and future. "Darkness" opens with the poet's statement that he has a dream in which everything is plunged into darkness because "The bright sun was extinguished and the stars/ Did wander in the eternal space."<sup>21</sup> This dark atmosphere is further developed and shown to have its dreadful consequences on the "icy earth" and its inhabitants who

**. . . forgot their passions in the dread  
Of this their desolation; and all hearts  
Were chilled into a selfish prayer for light.**

This poem takes the form of a series of successive haunting scenes that describe the universal catastrophe which suddenly invades the whole world. There is a scene in which the inhabitations of all things are set on fire:

**The palaces of crowned kings — the huts,  
The habitations of all things which dwell,  
Were burnt for beacons; cities were consumed,  
And men gathered round their blazing homes**

Men represent the centre of these miserable scenes. They are bewildered, fear-stricken and waiting for nothing but death, which is devouring not only men, but also "the wild birds" and "the wildest brutes".

However, there are two highly effective scenes in this poem which contribute to establishing an important fact concerning the last men who lose their good old virtues. The first scene is that of the faithful dog that does not assail his master:

**Even dogs assailed their masters, all save one  
And he was faithful to a corpse, and kept  
The birds and beasts and famished men at bay.**

This story attracts the reader's attention to the virtue of faithfulness which is ironically possessed by a dog, not a human being at such critical times. This is Byron's utmost bitter satire on the human world which is ugly and gravely corrupted. People are famished, and so, ready enough to eat the flesh of each other. The poet even sympathizes with this poor dog that is starved to death:

**. . . with a piteous and perpetual moan  
And a quick desolate cry, licking the hand  
Which answered not with a caress — he died.**

The second scene is that of the two enemies who happen to meet each other and discover each other's aspect in the feeble flame and die at once:

**The crowd was famished by degrees; but two  
Of an enormous city did survive  
And they were enemies; thy met beside  
The dying embers of an altar place**

.....

**The feeble ashes, and their feeble flame  
Blew for a little life, and made a flame  
Which was a mockery; then they lifted up  
Their eyes as it grew lighter, and beheld  
Each other's aspects — saw, and shrieked and died.**

This story shows that the human world is a world of ugly enmity which projects nothing but death. The concluding lines of the poem draw a sharp picture of a motionless, silent and empty world. The mechanisms of every sort of life come to an end.

The image of the sea and its waves which gradually die because of the dying ebb and flow is a shocking image and creates a horrible sense of inertia. There is also the image of the moon which expires, bringing about the death of the sea which no longer ebbs and flows. Darkness and stagnation overcome the whole world that is dying:

**The waves were dead; the tides were in their graves,  
The moon, their mistress, had expired before;  
The winds were withered in the stagnant air,  
. . . Darkness had no need  
Of aid from them — She was the universe.**

Blackstone says that "Darkness" is "a fragment of science fiction in verse . . . written with an almost clinical precision of statement which makes the horror of the subject even more intense."<sup>22</sup> However, this poem is much more effective and haunting than what science fiction aspires to present. Blackstone also says that this poem has little emotional development. This may be related to the fact that there is a sense of shrinking subjectivity — a point which is not reprehensible to be taken against Byron. Rather, it shows that the sensitivity of the Romantic poet can transcend the limitations of the subjective world and dive into the largest sea of objectivity, especially in such universal matters like the apocalyptic.

In his essay, "The Byronic Byron", Gilbert Phelps shows another aspect of the apocalyptic which is viewed as a return to primitivism. He thinks that this poem presents a primitivistic vision of the world:

**['Darkness' presents] . . . a terrifying picture of a world dying as the result of some cosmic cataclysm, in the cause of which all human values have been destroyed and man has returned to a kind of savagery — such a world as one might envisage 'after the Bomb'.<sup>23</sup>**

This view, like the one held by Leslie A. Marchand, focuses on the primitive bestiality of the last men. Those men are not only primitive, but also unheroic:

**['Darkness'] pictures with immitigable cynicism and despair the unheroic end of the last men on a dying planet. The blank verse reinforced with a vocabulary of gloom creates an intolerable atmosphere in which humanity has returned to the bestiality whence it sprang.<sup>24</sup>**

Byron's use of fire-images together with some auditory ones is also noticeable in this poem. Images such as "blazing homes", "volcanoes", "mountain-torch", "crash", "crackling", "shrieked", "hissing", "moan" . . . etc are scattered throughout this poem.

They create an inferno-like atmosphere that exactly suits the universal catastrophe invading the whole world. Further, there is also the use of the solar-lunar images in this poem. One can obviously see that there is an undeniable relationship between prophecy and such cosmic phenomena. Not only does this matter have its own religious side, but it also has a mythological dimension going back to the early stages of Man's thinking about the universe

and his future. There are many images of this type in this poem. Their poetic significance lies in the fact that they dramatically show how the universe would look like without the presence of the sun and the moon. Darkness, chaos, fear, inertia, stagnation and death are only some of the terrible consequences of the absence of the sun and the moon. Worse enough, the death of time is caused by this absence as well as the advent of the Day of Judgment.

Consequently, it is obvious that this poem does not represent the Romantic vision of the human future which is an ideal Utopian, meliorist one. Rather, this poem both reflects Byron's non-conformist attitude to religion, a point to be contrasted with Swift's religious devotion and the dark aspect of the Romantics' view of the end of the world.

#### (IV)

A discussion of Yeats's apocalyptic vision makes it incumbent on us to give a bird's-eye view of the general character of the modern age. In fact, the modern age sees the disintegration of every solid pillar that can sustain the individual in his confrontation with the adversities of the modern life. This idea is best stated by W.H.

Auden while he gives an account of Yeats's age:  
**Yeats . . . was faced with the modern problem, i.e. of living in a society in which men are no longer supported by tradition without being aware of it, and in which, therefore, every individual who wishes to bring order and coherence into the stream of sensations, emotions, and ideas entering his consciousness, from without and within is forced to do deliberately for himself what in previous ages had been done for him by family, custom, church and state, namely the choice of principles and presuppositions in terms of which he can make sense of his experience.**<sup>25</sup>

This means that the modern man is left on his own personal resources to support himself in an ugly society which denies man the least amount of personal freedom. Zabel thinks that Yeats's life has

**a greater import than that of its rich opportunities and contacts. It is an emblem of modern experience, a parable of intellectual and moral conflict in an age of unstable thought, 'skeptical faith', moral irresponsibility and evasion.**<sup>26</sup>

In the light of these two critical views, it is possible to think that Yeats's apocalyptic vision is stamped with the touches of a man with a wide experience in a number of fields that contribute to the making of this vision.

Yeats's poetry is dominated by "theosophy, Rosicrucianism, spiritualism, Neo-Platonism and the system of AVision."<sup>27</sup> There is also a high intense use of symbol in Yeats's poetry. He thinks that "all great literature is created out of symbols."<sup>28</sup> The importance of symbols for Yeats lies in the fact that they are the basis of his system in A Vision. Further it is emphatically stated that Yeats belongs to "a general European [Symbolist] movement of which the French are leaders."<sup>29</sup>

There are three focal points around which Yeats's poetry revolves: his life-long interest in magic, the attempt he makes to establish his own system of symbolism in AVision and an inborn ardent zeal for religion. Yeats's interest in magic was strongly developed by his meeting with A.P. Sinnett's Esoteric Buddhism in 1885. This meeting introduced Yeats to both Theosophy which "offers itself as an interpretation of the inner meaning of world religion, Christian as well as Buddhist" and "the secret teaching of spiritual adepts living in

the remotest Himalayas."<sup>30</sup> In 1901, he was led to formulate the following beliefs which sum up his view of magic:

**[First], that the borders of our mind are ever shifting, and that many minds can flow into one another, as it were, and create or reveal a single mind . . . [Second], that the borders of our memories are as shifting, and that our memories are a part of one great memory, the memory of Nature herself. [Third], that this great mind and**

This means that the function of symbols is to stimulate the human mind which can be seen as a potential reservoir of endless visions and images upon which the whole of the human future and the world is engraved. These ideas may also introduce the collective unconsciousness as another source to feed the apocalyptic in virtue of the "one great memory".

As for Yeats's view of religion, one can see that it is a typical modern one. Austin Warren says that Yeats looks upon religion as "the search for knowledge of the unseen and for Gnostic power."<sup>32</sup> Possessing most of the required traits of the visionary, mystic, prophetic, cultist, and spiritualist, Yeats should have his own cosmology in which he ultimately believes as "symbols for dealing concretely with phenomena that can otherwise be dealt with only abstractly or not at all."<sup>33</sup> This is what A Vision means for Yeats. In this book, Yeats tries to find a material that reshapes the Christian myth which has lost its activity and ability to cope with the spirit of the modern age.

In A Vision, Yeats attempts to

**convert his magical experience into a systematic philosophy and wished for a system of thought that would leave his imagination free to create as it chose and yet make all that is created or should create, part of the one history and that is the soul's.**<sup>34</sup>

This freedom of the imagination is exactly what a creative poet should enjoy to build up his prophetic vision. The removal of all sorts of restrictions is the most required factor that can liberate the poet's potentialities to pour out his mind.

The experience of reading "The Second Coming" attracts the reader's attention to the fact that it is an account of a world of disintegration and instability. There is something missing in this world; something that is far more important than the technological and scientific progress that has been achieved. There is an utter absence of that old harmonious relationship between Man and God, the only relationship that can give life a satisfactory color.

Despite the fact that the title of the poem is directly taken from the Bible, the subject matter of the poem is not conventionally dealt with. The Christian myth of the second coming of Christ is reshaped and made much more suitable to cope with the general foreshadowing mood that prevails in the modern age:

**The title of the poem is derived from the Christian belief in the second coming of Christ . . . , but the god to be born in the second Bethlehem is a beast and not a beast like that in the Revelation, for it will not be subdued.**<sup>35</sup>

The idea of the Savior, which preoccupies a great deal of the Christian thought, is effectively introduced in this poem. The poet's attitude to this idea is typically modern and against the traditional Christian one. The presence of the god-beast image suggestively reveals the poet's fears and anxiety concerning the human future. This is the Yeatsian contribution to the apocalyptic which is wrapped with a new modern garment. This

reshaping of the idea of the Savior is the poet's method of diagnosing the corrupted state of the modern society in an age of skeptic faith.

This unique poetic contribution to the apocalyptic is further enhanced by the use of a special sort of personal symbolism which mainly comes from Yeats's A Vision. Kenneth Burke, in "On Motivation in Yeats", says that "Yeats's doctrine of the Great Memory would justify me in thus treating his symbolism in accordance with psycho-analytic interpretation in general."<sup>36</sup> It is the psychological dimension that represents another constituent of the apocalyptic. This is the contribution of the modern poet to the apocalyptic in an age which witnesses the flourish of the psychoanalytic theory.

Also important is the fact that Yeats's symbolism has its own religious color, reflecting the poet's deep interest in the esoteric:

**'The Second Coming' reveals . . . more than any other single poem, Yeats's own solution to the problem of the esoteric: he translates the private system to symbols in a recognizable tradition . . . [he] translates the special into terms that exist, as he says, in Spiritus Mundi—the great storehouse of the race.<sup>37</sup>**

The gyre is Yeats's personal symbol taken from A Vision. It stands for the huge gap between the starting point of Christianity, which is characterized by the strong old virtues of faith and religious piety, and the present situation of chaos, violence and blood-shed:

**Turning and turning in the widening gyre  
The falcon can not hear the falconer;  
Things fall apart; the centre can not hold;  
Mere anarchy is loosed upon the world,  
The blood-dimmed tide is loosed, and everywhere  
The ceremony of innocence is drowned;**

There is an utter absence of spiritual communication between the Great Masters such as Jesus Christ (the falconer) and the human mind (the falcon).

Allen Tate sees that "the gyre here can be visualized as the circling flight of the bird constantly widening until it has lost contact with the point, the centre to which it ought to be able to return."<sup>38</sup>

This interaction between symbolism and imagery contributes to the complexity of a prophetic vision produced by a poet whose creative imagination seems to avail him an area of contemplation richer than our common life.

The images that Yeats's uses in this poem back up his prophetic vision in the sense that they create a special atmosphere for this vision to grow and develop. One can see that these images fall into four categories: mythical (such as the sphinx), personal (such as the gyre and the beast), religious (such as the falcon and the falconer) and some other images taken from nature with anti-romantic connotations (such as the sun, the desert and the birds). There is a sense of novelty in the use of these images.

For instance, the image of the beast is not to be understood within the classical limits of its meaning. It is, in fact, associated with "a myth of even more ancient standing [than the Christian myth] — the Egyptian desert beast"<sup>39</sup> As stated above, it is not like the beast in the Revelation:

**A shape with lion body and the head of a man  
A gaze blank and pitiless as the sun**

**Is moving its slow things, while all about it  
Reel shadows of the indignant desert birds.**

The sphinx-like image dramatically represents the eternal conflict between the physical and the intellectual sides of man.

Yeats seems to be much more concerned with the objective world than his subjective cocoon. He is troubled with the general chaotic state that prevails in the world.

Yet, Stephen Spender thinks that in this poem "Yeats has put up a great many props, the largest prop of all being his own noble egotism."<sup>40</sup>

(V)

Al-Sayab's example invites us to touching upon some other important issues concerning his prophetic vision. There is a sense of oneness between the poet and the cares of his nation and age. This oneness makes the emanation of the poet's prophetic vision original. It is through this oneness that the poet can unite his poetic voice in a moment which is comprehensive enough to include the past and the present and to predict the future of this world.<sup>41</sup>

There are four essential axes around which a great deal of Al-Sayab's poetry revolves: the influence of English literature on his literary production, his modernism, skeptic religious thinking and Marxism. Al-Sayab was a student of English literature.

His poetry shows many traces of the influence of some distinguished English literary figures such as Shelley, Keats, Eliot, Stephen Spender, and Edith Sitwell. He is deeply interested in English Romanticism. This interest is in harmony with the Romantic Movement in the Arab Homeland, the Apollo Movement.<sup>42</sup>

Al-Sayab's poetic experience is closely related to modernism. An Iraqi critic, Majid Al-Samerai', holds that

**Part of what modernism represent is an apocalyptic attitude, and an overall comprehensive attitude to history. In this attitude, there is the elements of time, change and the relative personal as much as there is timelessness and absolute persistence. In this sense, it is an inclination to constant change and regenerated addition by including the poetic experience within the framework of the vision of the future.**<sup>43</sup>

In the light of this critical view, the apocalyptic represents the touch-stone in the domain of modernism and is related with the idea of time and timelessness.

Al-Sayab's modernism clearly reveals itself in the great contribution he made to liberating and reforming Arabic poetry. Al-Sayab's poem is thematically and formally different from the traditional Arabic poem which has dominated the literary scene for ages: "He makes his poem a question about the vision of destiny, setting the human existence in a state of conflicting movement."<sup>44</sup> In the hands of Al-Sayab the "New Poem", which is formally flexible, becomes an expression of the poet's verified experience.<sup>45</sup>

Al-Sayab's skeptic religious thinking is another shaping factor of his poetic experience. This skepticism is generally related to his study of English and French poetry, his Marxism, and the fall of the Arab Ideal on the political, social and intellectual levels.<sup>46</sup>

As a reaction against the corrupted world of reality which sinks in darkness and injustice, Al-Sayab thinks that the revolutionary process begins through the injustice imposed by the tyrant on the people which makes them acquire a consciousness of this reality. This public consciousness arouses fear in the Ruler whose repression intensifies.<sup>47</sup>

Al-Sayab was a member of the Communist Party in the late 1945. After the end of his dismissal and return to Baghdad, he joined the journal of the party "Al-Qaeda".

He adopts many communist ideas in his poetry such as freedom, social justice, equality, and the struggle against the unjust tyrant.<sup>48</sup> Al-Sayab's collection "Aasir" (Whirl-winds) is considered a dictionary of Marx words. However, no sooner had he adopted these ideas than he started attacking this culture.<sup>49</sup>

Two parallel dimensions can be seen in "A Prophecy and Vision": the subjective and the objective. The subjective dimension includes the poet's long-termed illness as well as a long list of serious problems. The objective dimension links to the diseased condition of the Arab Nation whose glory is clouded with darkness, crises and disasters. In fact, the vehement patriotic spirit of the poet can be traced in many poems written on various occasions. Despite his bad personal conditions, Al-Sayab remains faithful to his country and "the patriotic torch in his spirit does not die out."<sup>50</sup>

The Arabic version of the poem and the translated one are fully presented in the Appendix.<sup>51</sup>

The occasion of this poem is the prophecy of the Indian fortuneteller which immediately stirred Al-Sayab's poetic sensitivity:

**This prophecy disquieted the poet and led him from the terror of the vision to an interaction between the poet's imagined dream and his crying pain . . . as if this prophecy about the end of life stirred in him this tragic sensitivity to play on his heart the tragedy of existence.**<sup>52</sup>

This interaction between dream and pain is quite clear in the following lines:

**Asleep, I saw in the darkness of my dreams  
Visions that make breaths follow up and stop  
I waked to find them still glowing in my heart and breaking out  
. . . in the darkness of night . . . these visions were a volcano.**

The emotional development in this poem is remarkable enough to be sharply contrasted with the other poems we have studied before. It is the direct result of the poet's intense sensitivity and overwhelming subjectivity which work as the operating dynamo of the whole poem.

In parallel with the Biblical elements employed in Swift's "The Day of Judgment" and Yeats's "The Second Coming", Al-Sayab's "A Prophecy and Vision" largely depends on the Holy Koran as an authentic and rich source of the apocalyptic.

This source of the apocalyptic chiefly characterizes the Oriental poem. In fact, the Holy Koran is viable enough to overwhelm poetry with a limitless number of highly suggestive images and visions which truly depict the end of the world. It abounds with so many verses and suras that describe various scenes of the destruction of the universe and the advent of the Day of Judgment. The suras of Al-Takweer, Al-Wake'aa, Al-Qari'aa, Al-Fajir and so many other ones are good examples to illustrate the apocalyptic in the Holy Koran. The Koranic elements have their importance in infusing the poet's mind with inspiration. Following is only one example:

**We look at the sky and prevent our two children from looking  
At its horrifying darkness taken from hell.  
The stars smothered and fell in that darkness like sparks.**

The constituent of images and meanings derived from the Holy Koran is definitely richer than any other source material. This makes the experience of reading apoca-

lyptic poetry highly effective, leading the reader to a process of contemplating the end of a world which is, from a Koranic point of view, vain and passing. However, this sense is to be found in Al-Shabby's "A Conversation in the Graveyard" rather than "A Prophecy and Vision" because of Al-Sayab's skeptic religious thinking.

Closely connected to the creation of the apocalyptic vision is Al-Sayab's search for the poetic image which is one of the pillars of developing the patterns of poetic expression. His images reveal:

**their deep dimensions, deserting their obsolete function as a prop and decoration for the meaning of the theme to become a source of sense creation within the complexity of the poetic texture .<sup>53</sup>**

This means that Al-Sayab's images are dynamic enough to cope with the development of his ideas and the emotional content of his poetry. The power of these images "may not belong to the state of harmony between his self and things only . . . they also belong to the growth of the idea."<sup>54</sup>

"A Prophecy and Vision" is charged with various images that reflect numerous aspects of the poet's painful consciousness and agonized self. They embody the poet's response to this universal catastrophe which is embodied in his highly selected images. The fire-darkness images as well as some auditory ones are in the first rank.

We have, for instance, the images of "the scruple of darkness", "the darkness of my dreams", "a volcano", "darkness taken from hell", "sparks", "wailing", "shout", "rattle", "moan" and "groan". They spread throughout the poem, creating an atmosphere of gloom, frustration and perpetual agony which touch every inch of the poet's tortured self. They echo the poet's state of mind, a mind that is filled with the agony of adverse illness and gradual death. Also important in this respect is the use of the solar-lunar images. The image of the waning moon, which has already lost its brightness and beautiful appearance, may stand for some psychological implications related to the poet's dark self and long-term illness "Without moon, even though waning, I was about to be rooted out."

The idea of death, which dominates a great deal of Al-Sayab's poetry is another shaping factor having its bearing on the construction of a unique apocalyptic vision. It is the human fear aroused by the diviner's prophecy which activates death, changing it into a universal annihilation:

**The image of the end of the universe surrounds the poet with an intense terror. Yet, this terror does not prevent him from calming down his crying child before the scene of the dying world, reassuring him that his death will bring him to an eternal Resurrection.<sup>55</sup>**

The following lines best illustrate this dramatic scene which includes the poet and his son:

**O, my son, hide your child face in my bosom  
Hush . . . what story shall I tell you?  
The bubble burst out and everything was over  
Why did you come to this world?  
Your life-time reaches the night?  
To live four years and see the Hour of Resurrection  
You stand up and realize not what you see? You want to live  
And understand not that at the time of your death is your  
Resurrection, that this world has its end to an eternity of kingdom.  
Your heart? Oh . . . who has scared it?**

The image of the bubble that is about to burst out is highly suggestive, summing up the poet's present view of a dying world.

Another aspect of the apocalyptic vision in Al-Sayab's poem is the idea of mass death which shows "the absurdity of life through the absurdity of death seen by the poet's son who will witness his Resurrection without grasping its meaning."<sup>56</sup>

On the same level, death is closely related to the problem of time and the human present:

**The human present is controlled by appointed present. Man is present and can not be dropped on the future because the future is not under his power. The present also shrinks upon itself because of the dead morrow. That is what Al-Sayab feels in view of the fortuneteller's prophecy... This prophecy prevents the present from stretching into its natural course. But it does not prevent Al-Sayab from gathering his courage to face death and to sacrifice himself for the others.**<sup>57</sup>

The concluding lines of the poem demonstrate another aspect of the apocalyptic.

They reflect the poet's bold skeptical religious attitude. Seen within the limits of the poet's social and religious environment, this attitude is remarkable and unique:

**Your cry and fright embarrassed God  
On their behalf I question Him: Do You throw down the children  
To witness their parents' agony? Hopes make Your heart happy  
You fail.**

**The crown is about to fall down for my crying.**

This audacious confrontation with God could be seen as one of the symptoms of the poet's revolutionary and rebellious stand, Marxist views and cross-cultural modernism. This very spirit of religious skepticism leads to the emergence of nihilism as another shaping factor of Al-Sayab's apocalyptic vision. In his nihilistic view, Al-Sayab:

**sets out to deal with the problem of Time through his suffering self under the pressure of severe illness. The Indian diviner was able to stir the sorrow of the poet who is terrified by his fate and that he is prepared to any prophecy upon which he can drop his suffering.**<sup>58</sup>

Seen from this angle, this poem is a successful attempt which truly represents the Oriental poem which acquires an identity of its own. Al-Sayab could have depended on some other source material to build up this prophetic vision. Rather, he seems to drink deep from the Holy Koran to produce such an effective penetrating vision of the future. It is worth mentioning that this dependence on the Holy Koran may reflect the poet's own reading of this source which is completely different from Al-Shabby's, for example. At the same time, this poem bears a sharp contrast to Swift's "The Day of Judgment", as far as the Koranic-Biblical elements are concerned. It seems that the scope of Al-Sayab's vision is larger than Swift's, on the one hand, and is much more original and haunting, on the other. On the same level, one can see that the viability of the Holy Koran spares the poet the suffering of establishing a

## (VI)

Abul-Qasim Al-Shabby (1909-1934) is a great Tunisian poet who succeeds in establishing for himself a cultural background of various elements taken from the Arab tradition and the foreign translated Western literature of some distinguished poets such as

Shelley, Byron, and Goethe.<sup>59</sup> Indeed, he is one of the pillars of the Arab Romanticism represented by the Apollo movement. This cultural movement cultivates an interest in Nature **not as being a scene and landscape; it stores the secrets of the unknown. Here is [the Apollo members'] retirement to imagination and meditation, with a sense of mysticism and intellectual or philosophical symbolism.**<sup>60</sup>

In fact, the literary production of the members of the Apollo movement is stamped with a strong sense of “meditation of life, the creatures, Nature, the secrets of existence and Man's destiny to annihilation and death.”<sup>61</sup>

In their nature poetry, the members of the Apollo movement “established a link between the phenomena of nature and themselves. They were inspired by these natural phenomena to express their various psychological states.”<sup>62</sup> In the course of our study of "The Graveyard Conversation, we shall see that Al-Shabby largely depends on Nature as the main framework in which his ideas of the human future and the universe as a whole are fairly presented. The poet's use of Nature as such seems to be related to his mystical Gnosticism and philosophy.

The Arabic version of "The Graveyard Conversation" and the translated one can be found in the Appendix<sup>63</sup>:

The whole poem takes the form of negative questioning. This questioning means that the poet recognizes what is beyond these questions. The answer is hidden in the human memory and experience. It is a very bitter and exhausting answer which the poet tries to philosophize through a conversation with the spirit of the philosopher.

This spirit is also the poet's because the poet's mind and the philosopher's are intuitive minds depending on the internal sights. The idea of the expected future time, which is present in this poem, is associated with prophecy. The poet's task is to uncover what will happen to humanity as well as the other creatures in this universe.

As we have mentioned earlier, the poet employs Nature as the main framework in which his ideas, feelings, and questions travel searching for an answer to sooth the poet's pains and suffering.

The starting point around which this poem centers is the physical sensory world that includes the human world. Man and everything related to him becomes the spot up on which the poet wants to put his finger prophetically. Beauty, the dearest thing that Man possesses, is severely exposed to destruction and decay:

**Shall the smiles of these eyelids vanish?  
The flames of these cheeks die down?  
The roselets of those lips wither away?  
Those bosoms fall down on the dust?  
That erect bearing demolishes?  
A wonderful breast and neck,  
And those bright faces become ashen,  
The loveliness of that singular beauty?  
Like the wing of darkness, a bough becomes dusty,  
Of elegant tresses, curly and outstretched?  
And in the darkness of the graves, become  
Vain dust and little soil?**

This state of corruption is one of the requirements of the framework in which the apocalyptic works. It is worth establishing an important fact in this respect. Al-Shabby's apocalyptic vision is so extended that he can probe horizons that are larger than what we have

witnessed in the other poems. This penetration is the direct result of the poet's mystical Gnosticism and derived from the Koranic conception of existence. This conception may not necessarily look upon the apocalyptic as the end of everything. It may be the end of the physical world, but the gate of the world of eternity and spirits. This is a sort of preparation to explore the metaphysical world which Man reaches as "vain dust and little soil".

The poet's vision becomes deeper as his tone intensifies. He moves to the state of universal non-existence. He tries to prepare the reader to a state as if it were the Day of Judgment; a state in which the morning of existence becomes the night of non-existence. He gives a detailed description of universal extinction:

**Are the skies of this existence folded,  
This remote space goes away?  
Those ancient stars expire,  
This old time becomes senile?  
The marvelous morning of life dies,  
The terrible night of existence?  
The sun that decorates the garment of cloud,  
The shining moon and the open-handed cloud?  
The light that adorns the waves of the stream,  
And the charm that embroiders these flowery banks?**

This detailed description of the universal extinction mainly echoes the Koranic conception of non-existence. The poet's prophecy largely depends on what this world would become in the future. On a connected level, there is an emphasis on the problem of Time which matters most as far as the apocalyptic is concerned. Most of the present simple verbs used here (which include the future time) express a very rapid movement of things that occurs in the future: "goes away, expire, become senile . . . etc."

In another part of the poem there is an emphasis on the terrible way this universal non-existence will take place. For this purpose, the poet uses the image of "Hell's daughters". It is one of the innovated images in modern Arabic poetry. It indicates how the fiery sparks will spread on the earth. It is a suggestive hellish picture that gives an account of the process of universal collapse caused by this hellish storm:

**Like an angel, a wind passes  
And steps to the forest like thunder  
And a storm from Hell's daughters  
Her echo is like the lion's bellowing  
When it rages, the sides of mountains yell.  
When it walks, the rocks of highlands fall?**

This storm leaves nothing in the universe without being affected with its destructive power.

Also important is the emphasis laid on the elements of Nature which are all affected by this destruction:

**The birds that sing through the boughs,  
Shout with joy to the dawn among roses?  
Roses that adorn those hills,  
And drink every new light?  
From these roses the fragrance of passion  
And that of shy happy youth exhale?**

The images of "birds", "boughs", "the dawn among the roses", "hills", and the "fragrance of passion" refer to a state of rebirth on the earth. Yet, this rebirth is suddenly and in an unprecedented way attacked by "Hell's daughters". These are Koranic implications which can be traced in the Holy Koran.<sup>64</sup>

Again, the poet raises his questions and is afflicted with a state of terror and a severe sense of metaphysical despair. This despair morally injures the poet's dreams which create a beautiful and seeming fixed picture of existence. Yet, the ideas of non-existence and death are firmly fixed in the Holy Koran and the other monotheistic books. This creates a very severe conflict between death and the poet at every moment, making him unable to tolerate this dark destiny:

**Does the night of non-existence attack everything  
To let death delight in them beyond existence?  
And disperse them in the horrible Void,  
Like roses scattered by a stormy wind?  
And so vast the water of life runs dry,  
And the soul of fertile spring dies down.**

Death is effectively shown as an indifferent power that conquers everything in the realm of existence.

In an attempt to find an exit from this state of dark pessimism, the poet resorts to creating a philosopher out of himself that can answer his questions, listen to his meditations, and to teach him the wisdom of existence. In fact, the spirit of the philosopher can be seen as the other mind of the poet that, through a dramatic monologue starts to answer these questions:

**You have been tired of life, fearing ruin,  
And, had you remained alive, you would have been tired of eternity.  
Had you lived on the earth like mountains,  
Had not sipped the saliva of life,  
.....  
What the charm of that newly born spring is,  
Had not thought of the doubtful next day,  
Had not given your mind to the remote quest,  
What does the son of eternity expect  
Of the universe and he is the distant resident?  
What does he like and fear  
Of the universe and he is the ever-lasting resident?**

These are some of the questions that disquiet the poet. The spirit of the philosopher tries to calm the poet's anxiety and soothe the pain of his terror by teaching him a piece of wisdom concerning the mystery of existence and non-existence. She (the spirit of the philosopher) says that the poet's desire to survive for ever will make him isolated and estranged, like the mountains. Long survival does not necessarily impart Man with the realization of the secret charm of the creatures and the philosophy of love. She also attracts the poet's attention to the fact that instead of desiring an ever-lasting survival, the poet should contemplate the nature of life in which everything dies while non-existence remains as a moral lesson for those who will tread the path of life. Here, the poet depends on the use of dichotomies of thesis and antithesis to establish the fact that non-existence makes us cling to life more and more:

**Look, the system of life  
Is a precise one, amazing and singular.  
Nothing made life lovely but ruin  
And, nothing adorned it but the fear of graves.  
If it were not for the painful suffering of life,  
Men would not have realized the meaning of success.  
That who would not frightened by the austerity of glooms  
Would not be delighted by the new morning.**

"Life" vs. "ruin", "life" vs. "fear of graves", "the painful suffering of life" vs. "success", and "the austerity of glooms" vs. "the new morning" are those dichotomies which their importance in stirring the poet's mind to a better state of understanding and to endow him with a valuable piece of wisdom of life, existence and eternity.

After listening to this explanation of the philosopher's view of life and non-existence, the poet turns from the negative questioning to raise directly his questions to create an understanding of what is beyond life. In this sense, there is an identification between the external voice of the poet and the internal voice of the poet-philosopher. They become questions about the details of both existence and non-existence:

**If there is no escape from meeting death,  
For whom does this existence take place?  
What use does this life have ,  
This violent severe conflict,  
That beauty which is not boring,  
These melodies and that song,  
This darkness and that light,  
Those stars and this highland  
Why do we pass the valley of Time  
Quickly, but we do not come back?**

The poet raises all these questions in favor of coming up with the truth and keeping his poetically sensitive self away from its existential self-delusions and misleading thoughts. He arrives at the conviction that existence, non-existence, survival, renewal of life and death are all but manifestations of God's wisdom and divine plan which Man should submissively obey and accept. Consequently, the poet turns from his rebellious existential spirit to a mystical Gnostic one that believes in the wisdom of existence and God:

**We have been created to reach the end of perfection  
And become worthy of eternity's glory.  
Our souls are purified in life  
By the fire of distress and despair of promises.  
From the slips of our way we acquire  
Powers that are not weakened by constant ascension  
And a glory for us in eternity,  
Wreaths of splendid flowers.**

The tone maintained in the lines above convey a sense of mystical Gnosticism with which the poet is finally endowed. Life and death are tolerated as important steps on the ladder that leads to glory and perfection.<sup>65</sup>

To sum up, the Koranic influence makes Al-Shabby's view of the apocalyptic different from the views of the other poets. His mystical Gnosticism avails the opportunity to enter and explore the world of spiritual perfection. It is sharply contrasted with Al-Sayab's religious

skepticism which makes him imprisoned within the confinements of the physical world and unable to free himself from its gravity.

### (VII)

In conclusion, the employment of the apocalyptic visions in poetry is an essential factor that contributes to the effectiveness of poetry as a means of exploring the human future. There is a sense of settlement on many of the common factors that shape the human vision of the future. This settlement is achieved despite the cultural, religious, and historical differences among those five poets.

In Swift's "The Day of Judgment, we have an example of an apocalyptic vision visualized by an official religious man. This vision is a sermon-like one, reflecting the dictates of the church itself. It is an impassionate, purely biblical vision which tends to be didactic.

Byron's "Darkness" offers another type of the apocalyptic vision. It exemplifies that vision which is visualized by a purely non-religious and non-conformist poet who beautifully employs this vision to convey a satiric tone concerning the ugliness of the human world of infidelity.

Yeats's vision acquires its own psychological and philosophical dimension that does not stop at the traditional Christian limits. It reflects the poet's multifarious interests in magic, religion, myth, spiritualism, psychology . . .etc.

The Holy Koran forms a highly important source of the apocalyptic in Al-Sayab's poetry. The Koranic elements impart "A Prophecy and Vision" with a special thrilling effectiveness. Such effectiveness can not be created by the biblical elements in Swift's "The Day of Judgment", for example. The poet largely depends on the Holy Koran as a source of highly effective poetic images and scenes that truly depict the state of universal extinction. Also remarkable in Al-Sayab's poem is the high sense of subjectivity which makes the poem look like a mirror to reflect the minute details of the poet's psychological crises, particularly his obsessive fear of constant and haunting death related to his incurable illness.

Al-Shabby's "The Graveyard Conversation" presents a philosophized concept of the apocalyptic which is largely based on the Koranic view of this matter. In a sense, the apocalyptic acquires a broader dimension which does not mark the end of the world. Rather, it marks the beginning of a state of elevation and spiritual perfection.

They provide the poem with the required power of diction and ideas, elevating the poet's mind to a state of mystical Gnosticism.

### Notes

<sup>1</sup>Raman Selden, ed., A Reader's Guide to Contemporary Literary Theory (Kentucky: The Kentucky University Press, 1989), pp. 118-119.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid, p.119.

<sup>3</sup>J.R. Watson, English Poetry of the Romantic Period (London and New York: Longman, 1985), p.19.

<sup>4</sup>Ibid, p.20.

<sup>5</sup>Ibid, p.15.

<sup>6</sup>Ibid, p.27.

<sup>7</sup>J.A. Cuddon, A Dictionary of Literary Terms (New York: Penguin Books, 1984), p.51.

<sup>8</sup>Adonis, Al- Thabit Wel- Mutehawil: Sadmat El- Hedatha [The Fixed and the Changed : The Shock of Modernism] (Translation mine) (Beirut: Dar Al-awda, 1983), pp.164- 166.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

<sup>10</sup>Watson, p.56

<sup>11</sup>Harold Bloom and et al (eds.) The Oxford Anthology of English Literature vol. I (London: Oxford University

Press, 1973), p.1558.

<sup>12</sup>Pat Roger, An Introduction to Pope (London: Methuen Co. LTD, 1975), p.64.

<sup>13</sup>Ibid.

<sup>14</sup>All of Swift's poetry quoted in this paper is taken from Frank Kermode and John Hollander (eds.), The Oxford Anthology of English Literature vol. I (London: Oxford University Press, 1973).

<sup>15</sup>Ernest Tuveson, "Introduction" in Twentieth- Century Views: Swift— A Collection of Critical Essays (Prentice-Hall: Englewood Cliffs, N.J., 1964), p. 3.

<sup>16</sup>Ibid, p.10.

<sup>17</sup>Tuveson, "Swift: The Dean as Satirist" in Twentieth-Century Views, p.103.

<sup>18</sup>Watson, p.10.

<sup>19</sup>Bernard Blackstone, Byron: A Survey (London: Longman, 1975), p. 150.

<sup>20</sup>Charles E. Robinson, Shelley and Byron: The Snake and the Eagle Wreathed in Flight (London: The John Hopkins University Press, 1976), p.254.

<sup>21</sup>All of Byron's poetry quoted in this paper (as well as Yeats's) is taken from Frank Kermode and John Hollander (eds.), The Oxford Anthology of English Literature vol. II (London: Oxford University Press, 1973)

<sup>22</sup>Blackstone, p.150.

<sup>23</sup>Gilbert Phelps, "The Byronic Byron" in John D. Jump, ed., Byron: A Symposium (London: The Macmillan Press, 1975), p.68.

<sup>24</sup>Leslie A. Marchand, Byron's Poetry: A Critical Introduction (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1968), p.128.

<sup>25</sup>W.H. Auden, "Yeats as an Example" in James Hall and Martin Steinmann (eds.), The Permanence of Yeats (New York: Collier Books, 1961), p.312.

<sup>26</sup>Morton Dauwen Zabel, "The Book and the Image" in The Permanence of Yeats, p.318.

<sup>27</sup>James Hall and Martin Steinmann, "The Seven Sacred Trances" in The Permanence of Yeats, p.2.

<sup>28</sup>Edmund Wilson, "W.B. Yeats" in The Permanence of Yeats, p.24.

<sup>29</sup>Tindall, "The Symbolism of W.B. Yeats" in The Permanence of Yeats, p.238.

<sup>30</sup>Austin Warren, "William Butler Yeats: The Religion of a Poet" in The Permanence of Yeats, p.203.

<sup>35</sup>Frank Kermode and John Hollander (eds.), The Oxford Anthology of English Literature vol.II, p. 1699.

<sup>36</sup>Kenneth Burke, "On Motivation in Yeats" in The Permanence of Yeats, p. 230.

<sup>37</sup>James Hall . . . "The Seven Sacred Trances" in The Permanence of Yeats, p.4.

<sup>38</sup>Allen Tate, "Yeats's Romanticism: Notes and Suggestions", in The Permanence of Yeats, p.104.

<sup>39</sup>James Hall and Steinmann, "The Seven Sacred Trances" in The Permanence of Yeats, p. 4.

<sup>40</sup>Stephen Spender, "Yeats as a Realist" in The Permanence of Yeats, p. 171.

<sup>41</sup>Selam Al-Awsi, "Az-zemen fi Shi'ir Al-Rouad" [Time in the Poetry of the Pioneers: Al-Sayab, Al-Bayaty, Al-Haydery, and Nazik Al-Mela'ika]. (M.A. Thesis)(University of Baghdad, College of Education, 1990), p.117.

<sup>42</sup>Al-Sayab, Poetical Works, vol.I (Beirut: Dar Al-Awda, 1971), pp. 1-10.

<sup>43</sup>Majid Al-Samera'i, "Arabic Poetry in the Late Twentieth Century" in "The Tenth Merbid Poetical Festival (Baghdad, Dar Al-Huriya For Printing), p. 4.

<sup>44</sup>Ibid, p.5.

<sup>45</sup>Ibid, p.6.

<sup>46</sup>Al-Sayab, Poetical Work, pp. 1-10.

<sup>47</sup>Abdul-Kareem Hassan, The Thematic Structure: A Study in Al-Sayab's Poetry (Beirut: Al-Mu'assasa Al-Jami'a For Publication and Studies, 1983), p. 352.

<sup>48</sup>Ibid, p.355.

<sup>49</sup>Ibid.

<sup>50</sup>Ibid.

<sup>51</sup>The Arabic version of Al-Sayab's "A Prophecy and Vision is taken from Al-Sayab's Poetical Works vol.I (Beirut: Dar Al-Awda, 1971).

<sup>52</sup>Al-Awsi, p.118.

<sup>53</sup>Majid Al-Samera'i, pp.11-12.

<sup>54</sup>Ibid, p.12.

<sup>55</sup>Abdul-Kareem Hassan, p.245.

<sup>56</sup>Ibid, p.248.

<sup>57</sup>Ibid, p.252.

<sup>58</sup>Al-Awsi, p.119.

<sup>59</sup>Abul-Qasim Al-Shabby, Poetical Works vol.I (Beirut: Dar Al-Jeel, 1997), p.7.

<sup>60</sup>Adonis, *Al-Thabit Wel-Mutahawil*, p. 114.

<sup>61</sup>Salim Al-Hamdani and Fa'ik Mustafa Ahmed, *Modern Arabic Literature: A Study in its Poetry and Prose* (Mosul: Mosul University Press, 1987), p. 180.

<sup>62</sup>Ibid, p. 181.

<sup>63</sup>The Arabic version of "The Graveyard Conversation" is taken from Abul-Qasim Al-Shabby, *Poetical Works* vol.I (Beirut: Dar Al-Jeel, 1997).

<sup>64</sup>Dr. Selam Al-Awsi, "Modern Arabic Poetry: A Study and Analysis — Al-Shabby as an Example", a lecture delivered at the College of Arts, Department of Arabic, (April, 2007).

<sup>65</sup>Ibid.

## Appendix

### نبوءة و رؤيا

"تنبأ عراف هندي بأن الحياة على الأرض ستنتهي يوم ٢ شباط ١٩٦٢ ."  
 نبوءتك المريرة عذبتي ، مزقت روحي ،  
 نبوءتك الرهيبة ، أيها العراف تبكيني ،  
 رأيت مسالك الأفلاك تهرعُ بالملايين .  
 قرأتُ خواطرَ الريح  
 ووسوسة الظلام كأن حقلًا بات ينتحب :  
 "ستتطفئ الحياة ، ورحلت ترسم موعدَ القدر .  
 إذا حدجتني الشهبُ  
 هتفتُ بها : "غدا سنموت . فانهمري على البشر :

لأهون أن أموت لديك وحدي دون حشرجة ولا أنه  
 من القدر المروع يجرف الأحياء بالآلاف . "  
 ولكنني أصيخ الي النهار فأسمع العراف  
 يهدد : "سوف يهلك من عليها ، سوف تلتهبُ . "

وتسرب في دمي جنه .  
 وحين رقدت أمس رأيتُ في ظلموت أحلامي  
 رؤى تتلاحق الأنفاس منها ثم تنقطع  
 أفقتُ وماتزال تضيء في خلدي وتندلع  
 كما يتفجر البركان في ظلمات ليل دون أنسام ،  
 بلا قمر وان يك في المحاق أكاد أقتلع  
 أكاد أمزق الدم في عروقي بارتعادة روعي الحبرى . . .  
 أكاد أعانق القبرا  
 أرى أفقا وليلا يطبق عليّ من شرفه  
 ولي ولزوجتي ، في الصمت ، عند حدودها وقفه  
 نحدق في السماء ونمنع الطفلين من نظر  
 الي ما في دجاها الرابع المأخوذ من سقر ،

تطفأت الكواكب وهي تسقط فيه كالشرر  
 تطفأ تحت ذيل الريح وهي تسفه سفا ،  
 كان عصا تسوق مواكب الأفلاك في صحراء من ظلم ،  
 ويلهث تحتنا الأجر ، ويزحف تحتنا زحفا . . .  
 تضعض فهو يمسك نفسه ويأمن من ألم

ليهو ي حين يغفل ، حين يعجز ثم ينهار :  
 دجى نثرت بها نار  
 بني اليك صدري ، فيه فادفن وجهك الطفلا  
 بني صه أقص عليك . . . أية قصة عندي ؟  
 تفجرت الفقاعة وانتهى أبد الى حد :  
 علام أتيت للعنيا ؟  
 ليدرك عمرك اللبلا ؟  
 لتحيا أربع السنوات ثم لتبصر الساعة  
 تقوم ولست تدرك ما تراه ؟ تريد أن تحيا  
 وتجهل أن موتك فيه بعثك ، أن للعنيا  
 نهاية سلم يفضي الى ابد من الملكوت  
 قلبك ؟ أه . . . من راعه ؟  
 بكاؤك وارتابك فيهما لله احراج  
 وباسمهما أسائله الحساب : اتصرع الأطفال  
 لتشهد لوعة الآباء ؟ تسعد قلبك الآمال  
 تخيب !!

يكاد يهو ي من صراخي عنده التاج  
 ويهدم عرشه ويخر ، تطفأ عنده الأباد والأزال  
 ويقطر لابن آدم قلبه ألما وينفطر .

The translation of this poem would be (translated by the researcher):  
**A Prophecy and Vision**

"An Indian diviner prophesied that life  
 on the Earth would end on 2<sup>nd</sup> February, 1962."  
 Your bitter prophecy tortured me, tore my soul.  
 Your grave prophecy, O Fortuneteller, makes n me weep  
 You saw the ways of orbits that rushed with millions of men  
 The wind's notions you read  
 And the scruples of darkness, like a field, wailing  
 "Life will die out", and you set out to draw Fate's deadline.  
 If the stars stared at me  
 "We shall die tomorrow ", I shouted to them, "Pour down on men".

To die alone before you without a rattle and moan is easier  
 Than the frightening Fate, sweeping away thousands of the living  
 But I lend my ear to the day-time and hear the fortuneteller  
 Threatening: "Whatever on the earth shall die, the earth shall burn."

Madness seeped through my blood.  
 Asleep, I saw in the darkness of my dreams  
 Visions that make breaths follow up and stop  
 I waked to find them still glowing in my heart and breaking out  
 Breaking out in the darkness of night without breath, these visions were a volcano.  
 Without moon, even though waning, I was about to be rooted out  
 I was about to tear the blood in my veins by the shiver of my helpless soul.  
 I was about to embrace the grave.  
 I see a horizon and night covering me from a balcony,

Which my wife and I stand at with silence  
We look at the sky and prevent our two children from looking  
At its horrifying darkness taken from hell.

The stars smothered and fell in that darkness like sparks.  
The sparks were out under the tail of the wind which drives them  
Like a stick that drove the procession of stars in a desert of darkness  
Beneath us the backed brick pants and crawls,  
He weakens, holds himself and groans painfully,  
Falls down when he cares not and breaks down.

It's darkness dispersed with fire  
O, my son, hide your child face in my bosom  
Hush . . . what story shall I tell you?  
The bubble burst out and everything was over  
Why did you come to this world?  
Your life-time reaches the night?  
To live four years and see the Hour of Resurrection  
You stand up and realize not what you see? You want to live.  
And understand not that at the time of your death is your Resurrection, that this world Has its end to an eternity  
of kingdom.  
Your heart? Oh . . . who has scared it?

Your cry and fright embarrassed God.  
On their behalf I question Him: Do You throw down the children  
To witness their parent's agony? Hopes make Your heart happy.

You fail!!  
Because of my cry the crown is about to fall down  
And His throne is about to collapse and fall down, around it the eternities die down  
And His heart drops blood and breaks for Man.

### حديث المقبرة

كتب في ٣ نيسان-أبريل ١٩٣٢ (ذو القعدة ١٣٥٠) متسانلا في جدوى الحياة والموت ، عبر حوار  
بينه وبين روح فليسوف ، هائم النظرات في المرامي البعيدة للوجود:

ويخبر توهج تلك الخدود؟ وتهوي الى التراب تلك النهود؟ وينحل صدر بديع ، وجيد؟ وفتنة ذاك الجمال الفريد؟ انيق الغدائر ، جعد ، مديد؟ هباء حقيرا ، وتربا زهيدا؟ وسكر الشباب الغرير السعيد؟ * *	أتفنى ابتسامات تلك الجفون؟ وتذوي وريجات تلك الشفاه؟ وينهد ذاك القوام الرشيق ، وتربذ تلك الوجوه الصباح ، ويغبر فرع ، كجنح الظلام ، ويصبح ن في ظلمات القبور ، وينجاب سحر الغرام القوي ،
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ويذهب هذا الفضاء البعيد؟ ويهرم هذا الزمان العهيد؟ وليل الوجود الرهيب ، العتيد؟ وبدر يضيء ، وغيم يجود؟ وسحر يطرز تلك البرود؟ يضج ويدوي دوي الوليد؟	أتطوى سماوات هذا الوجود ، وتهلك تلك النجوم القدامى ، ويقضي صباح الحياة البديع ، وشمس توشى رداء الغمام ، وضوء يرصع موج الغدير ، وبحر فسيح ، بعيد القرار ،
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وتخطو الى الغاب خطو الرعود؟  
 كأن صداها زئير الأسود  
 وتمشي ، فتتهوي صخور التّجود؟  
 وتهتف للفجر بين الورود؟  
 وينهلّ من كل ضوء جديد؟  
 ونفح الشباب الحيّ السّعيد؟

\* \*

أيسطو على الكل ليل الفناء ،  
 وينثرها في الفراغ المخيف ،  
 فينضب يم الحياة الخضم ،  
 فلا يلثم النور سحر الخدود ،

\* \*

كبير على النفس هذا العفاء!  
 وماذا على القدر المستمر ،  
 ولم يخفروا بالخراب المحيط ،  
 ولم يسلكوا للخلود المرجى ،  
 فدام الشباب ، وسحر الغرام ،  
 وعاش الوري في سلام أمين ،  
 ولكن هو القدر المستبد ،

\* \*

وكانت بين القبور روح فليسوف قديم مجهول ، فجاءت تزور جسمها الذي أصبح رمة بالية في أحشاء التراب ،  
 فأشفقت على الشاعر المسكين من آلامه الروحية وحيرته الظائمة ، فأرادت أن تعلمه الحكمة ، وتسكب في قلبه برد اليقين  
 . فحاطبته بهاته الأبيات :

تيرمت بالعيش خوف الفناء ،  
 وعشت على الأرض مثل الجبال  
 فلم ترتشف من رضاب الحياة ،  
 ولم تدر ما فتنة الكائنات ،  
 ومانشوة الحب عند المحب ،  
 ولم تفتكر بالغد المستراب ،  
 وماذا يرجي ربيب الخلود  
 وماذا يود ، وماذا يخاف

\* \*

تأمل فإن نظام الحياة  
 فما حبيب العيش الا الفناء  
 ولولا شقاء الحياة الأليم ،  
 ومن لم يرعه قطوب الدجاجير

نظام دقيق ، بديع ، فريد  
 ولا زانه غير خوف اللحد  
 لما أدرك الناس معنى الخلود  
 لم يغتبط بالصباح الجديد

وراق حديث الروح الشاعر العائش بين الهواتف والأشباح فقال يحاورها :

إذا لم يكن من لقاء المنيا  
 فأبي غناء لهذي الحياة ،  
 وذاك الجمال الذي لايميل  
 وهذا الظلام ، وذاك الضياء ،  
 لماذا نمر بوادي الزمان  
 فنشرب من كل نبع شرابا ،

مناص ، لمن حل هذا الوجود  
 وهذا الصراع العنيف الشديد  
 وتلك الأغاني ، وذاك النشيد؟  
 وتلك النجوم ، وهذا الصعيد  
 سراعاً ، ولكننا لا نعود؟  
 ومنه الرفيع ، ومنه الزهيد؟

ومنه اللذيذ ، ومنه الكريه ،  
 ونحمل عبثا من الذكريات ،  
 ونشهد أشكال هذي الوجوه ،  
 وفيها البديع ، وفيها الشنيع ،  
 فيصبح منها الولي الحميم ،  
 وكل ، اذا ما سأناه الحياة ،  
 أتيناها من عالم لا نراه ،  
 وما شأن هذا العداء العنيف؟  
 ومنه المشيد ومنه المبيد ،  
 وتلك العهود التي لا تعود  
 وفيها الشقي وفيها السعيد  
 وفيها الوديع ، وفيها العنيد  
 ويصبح منها العدو الحقود  
 غريب ، لعمرى بهذا الوجود  
 فرادى ، فما شأن هذي الحقود؟  
 وما شأن هذا الأقاء الودود؟

\* \*

روح الفليسوف :

خلقنا لنبلغ شأو الكمال  
 وتطهر أرواحنا في الحياة ،  
 ونكسب من عثرات الطريق  
 ومجدا ، يكون لنا في الخلود ،  
 ونصبح أهلا لمجد الخلود  
 بنار الأسى ، ويأس الوعود  
 قوى ، لا تهدد بدأب الصعود  
 أكاليل من رائعات الخلود

ومر بالمقبرة سرب من الأرواح ، في طريقها الى العالم المجهول. فطارت معها روح الفليسوف ، وخلفت عالم الشك والكآبة لأبنائه البائسين. وظل الشاعر يردد بينه وبين نفسه :

خلقنا لنبلغ شأو الكمال  
 ونصبح أهلا لمجد الخلود

ولكن أفكاره الثائرة التي لاتهدأ كانت لاتزال تلح عليه بالأسئلة الكثيرة المرهقة . فقال يناجي روح الفليسوف التي حسبها مازالت قريبة منه :

ولكن اذا ما لبسنا الخلود  
 فهل لا نمل دوام البقاء؟  
 وكيف يكونن هذا الكمال؟  
 وان جمال الكمال الطموح ،  
 فما سحره ، ان غدا واقعا  
 هل ينطفيء في النفوس الحنين ،  
 فلا تطمح النفس فوق الكمال ،  
 اذا لم يزل شوقها في الخلود ،  
 وحرب ضرورس ، كما قد عهدت ،  
 وان زال عنها فذاك الفناء  
 ونلنا كمال النفوس البعيد  
 وهل لا نود كمالا جديدا؟  
 ماذا تراه؟ وكيف الحدود؟  
 وما دام فكرا يرى من بعيد  
 يحس ، وأصبح شيئا شهيدا؟  
 وتصيح أشواقنا في خمود؟  
 وفوق الخلود لبعض المزيد؟  
 فذاك ، لعمرى ، شقاء الجدود  
 ونصر وكسر ، وهم مديد  
 وان كان في عرصات الخلود .

\* \*

كذلك ناجى الشاعر روح الفليسوف ، ولكنها كانت اذ ذاك بعيدة عنه في عالم بعيد لا يسمع نجواه ، وكذلك ضاعت أسئلة الشاعر في ظلمة الليل الذي لا يسمع ولا يجيب.

**The translation of this poem would be (translated by the researcher):**

### **The Graveyard Conversation**

In April, 3rd 1932, (26 Thul-Qi'da, 1350), he wrote this poem, questioning the significance of life and death through a conversation between himself and the spirit of a philosopher, with puzzled looks at the outlying ranges of existence:

Shall the smiles of these eyelids vanish?  
 The flames of these cheeks die down?  
 The roselets of those lips wither away?  
 Those bosoms fall down on the dust?  
 That slim figure demolishes?  
 A wonderful breast and neck,  
 And those bright faces become ashen,  
 The loveliness of that singular beauty?  
 Like the wing of darkness, a bough becomes dusty,  
 Of elegant tresses, curly and outstretched?  
 And in the darkness of the graves, become  
 Vain dust and little soil?  
 The charm of strong passion parts?  
 The inebriety of naïve happy youth.

★ ★ ★ ★

Are the skies of this existence folded,  
 This remote space goes away?  
 Those ancient stars expire,  
 This old time becomes senile?  
 The marvelous morning of life dies,  
 The terrible night of existence?  
 The sun that decorates the garment of cloud,  
 The shining moon and the open-handed cloud?  
 The light that adorns the waves of the stream,  
 And the charm that embroiders these flowery banks?  
 A bottomless wide sea,  
 Roars and yells like a child?  
 Like an angel, a wind passes  
 And steps to the forest like thunder  
 And a storm from Hell's daughters  
 Her echo is like the lion's bellowing  
 When it rages, the sides of mountains yell.  
 When it walks, the rocks of highlands fall?  
 The birds that sing through the boughs,  
 Shout with joy to the dawn among roses?  
 Roses that adorn those hills,  
 And drink every new light?  
 From these roses the fragrance of passion  
 And that of shy happy youth exhale?

★ ★ ★ ★

Does the night of non-existence attack everything  
 To let death delight in them beyond existence?

And disperse them in the horrible Void,  
 Like roses scattered by a stormy wind?  
 And so vast the water of life runs dry,  
 And the soul of fertile spring dies down.

★ ★ ★ ★

Great on the soul is this non-existence!  
 And hard on the heart is this death!  
 What is it on the unceasing Fate  
 If people had enjoyed the taste of eternity?!  
 If they had not been protected by the surrounding ruin  
 If they had not been stricken by the death of the beloved?!  
 If they had not followed for the expected eternity  
 Death's path and the darkness of graves?!  
 Would youth have lasted, the charm of passion  
 Spring's art, and the delicateness of roses?!  
 Would the mortals have lived in safe peace,  
 And green, relaxed and easy life?!  
 But it is the tyrannical Fate  
 That is delighted in our wailing as if it were a song.

Among the graves, there was the spirit of an unknown ancient philosopher coming to visit its body which became a rotten thing in the heart of soil. This spirit felt pity for the poor poet due to his spiritual pains and thirsty bewilderment. So, it wanted to teach him a piece of wisdom and pour in his heart the coolness of conviction by addressing him with the following lines:

You have been tired of life, fearing ruin,  
 And, had you remained alive, you would have been tired of eternity.  
 Had you lived on the earth like mountains,  
 Great, dreadful, strange and alone,  
 Had not sipped the saliva of life,  
 Had not had the nectar of existence as a breakfast,  
 Had not known what the charm of the creatures is,  
 What the charm of that newly born spring is,  
 Had not thought of the doubtful next day,  
 Had not given your mind to the remote quest,  
 What does the son of eternity expect  
 Of the universe and he is the distant resident?  
 What does he like and fear  
 Of the universe and he is the ever-lasting resident?

★ ★ ★ ★

Look, the system of life  
 Is a precise one, amazing and singular.  
 Nothing made life lovely but ruin  
 And, nothing adorned it but the fear of graves.  
 If it were not for the painful suffering of life,  
 Men would not have realized the meaning of success.  
 That who would not be frightened by the austerity of glooms  
 Would not be delighted by the new morning.

★ ★ ★ ★

The spirit's conversation pleased the poet who was among the shouts and, so he conversed with the spirit saying:

If there is no escape from meeting death,  
 For whom does this existence take place?

What use does this life have ,  
 This violent severe conflict,  
 That beauty which is not boring,  
 These melodies and that song,  
 This darkness and that light,  
 Those stars and this highland  
 Why do we pass the valley of Time  
 Quickly, but we do not come back?  
 From every spring we drink syrup.  
 Some of it is expensive, some is cheap,  
 Some is tasty, some is hateful,  
 Some is refreshing, some is deathful.  
 We bear burden memoirs,  
 And those promises that are no more,  
 And see the forms of these faces,  
 Among them there is wretched and happy,  
 Among them admirable and disgraceful,  
 Among them calm and stubborn,  
 Of whom there becomes the close friend  
 And the resentful enemy.  
 If we ask life about them, each  
 Upon my life is strange in this existence.  
 We have come to this existence from a world that we do not witness  
 One by the other, what have this malice got to do?  
 What has this violent enmity got to do?  
 What has this fond brotherhood got to do?

\* \* \* \*

The philosopher's spirit:  
 We have been created to reach the end of perfection  
 And become worthy of eternity's glory.  
 Our souls are purified in life  
 By the fire of distress and despair of promises.  
 From the slips of our way we acquire  
 Powers that are not weakened by constant ascension  
 And a glory for us in eternity,  
 Wreaths of splendid flowers.

\* \* \* \*

A flock of spirits passed the graveyard and on their way to the unknown world the philosopher's spirit fled  
 with them, leaving the world of doubt and depression for its helpless sons. The poet is still reciting himself:  
 We have been created to reach the end of perfection  
 And become worthy of eternity's glory.

But his rebellious ideas which do not calm down are still demanding many exhausting questions. Thinking  
 that the philosopher is still near him, the poet soliloquizes:

But if we had put on eternity,  
 And achieved the distant perfection of souls,  
 Should we not become bored of immortality?  
 Should we not like a new perfection?  
 How should this perfection be like?  
 How is it? How would its limits be ?  
 And, the beauty of the ambitious perfection  
 As long as it is an idea seen from far,  
 What charm would it have when it became real,

Felt as a visible thing?  
 Would nostalgia extinguish in the souls,  
 And our yearnings are in extinction?  
 The soul aspires not over perfection  
 And over eternity for some excess.  
 If the soul yearning is in eternity,  
 That is upon my life the wretchedness of fortunes,  
 A fierce war, as I knew  
 Triumph, shattering and extensive care  
 If eternity left the soul, it would be death,  
 Even if it were in the courts of eternity.

Also the poet soliloquized the philosopher's spirit, but it was far away, in a distant world, not hearing his soliloquy. In this way, the poet's questions were lost in the darkness of night that neither hears nor responds.

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## الخلاصة

نحو رؤى تنبؤية كونية — دراسة في قصائد مختارة لسويفت وبايرون وييتس  
والسياب وأبو القاسم الشابي

ان مملكة الشعر واسعة بما فيه الكفاية لأن تجمع معا تلك الخيوط التي تربط الإنسانية وتجمع شملها. يعد مستقبل الإنسانية أحد تلك الخيوط التي تشغل الشعراء الذين يعتبرون أنفسهم "مشرعي تاريخ الإنسانية غير المعترف بهم" — كما يقول شيلي . وتتعدى الرؤى التنبؤية الأختلافات الثقافية والدينية لتصبح هاجسا كونيا يبدو أنه ينبع من مصدر واحد ويهدف الى تحقيق الغرض نفسه . ان هذه الدراسة هي محاولة لتسليط الضوء على بعض الرؤى التنبؤية التي يصورها شعراء يعودون الى عصور وثقافات مختلفة . وتظهر هذه الدراسة أن تلك الرؤى توظف لمسرحة تلك المحاولات التي تبغي كشف المستقبل الإنساني الغامض .