

2017

Narrating Pain and Freedom: Place and Identity in Modern Syrian Poetry (1970s-1990s)

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NARRATING PAIN AND FREEDOM: PLACE AND IDENTITY IN MODERN SYRIAN POETRY
(1970s-1990s)

by

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Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements

For the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy in

Comparative Literature

College of Arts and Sciences

University of South Carolina

2017

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Dedication

For my mother, Mayada Arabi, my father, Giath Shabouk, and my brothers Rifat and Shadi. Your presence in my life has always been the light and the home for my words and soul. And to my beautiful city: Aleppo.

Acknowledgements

This dissertation would not have been completed without the support of my professors, friends, and family. Professor Stephen Sheehi gave me some of the best academic enlightenment for years and taught me that inspiration is not enough—it has to be accompanied by good perspiration, which I never forgot in graduate school. Professor Drue Barker, the wonderful feminist academic, taught me not to forget to relate academia to life, to people’s struggles and issues. I thank her for being a great source of support and insight at the hardest times. Thanks to Professor Jie Guo, whose teachings and classes inspired my work and opened my eyes to new venues! To the wonderful professor Isis Sadek, who kept encouraging me to pursue my path and who has been a source of support and empowerment.

Special thanks to all the phenomenal women in my life who were always there giving a hand, a smile, sharing a home-cooked meal, a story to brighten my heart, and words of wisdom to strengthen me when the road looked too hard to continue: Ane Steckenbiller, Chaya Cooper, Daren Douchi, Dana Hassan, Mariangeles Borghini, Areej Helwe, Rima Sadek, Jacinthe Assad, Samantha Kostmayer, and Alia Hadid. Special thanks to my friend Amal Equeiq, whose friendship and sincerity always made the road look brighter. Special thanks to my wonderful friends and comrades: Bernard Oniwe, Juan Cruz, Marc Demont, and Maad el-gali who were always there to share stimulating discussions and stories and to always raise my spirits.

My wonderful friend and editor Alexis Stratton gave me tremendous support and encouragement. Her exquisite editing skills and sharp eye helped me in the writing process and taught me how rewriting could bring a better writing.

Nicole Fisk, a precious and a kind friend, was always by my side to support, stand by, and motivate me to see a brighter path through the darkest times. She and her family Scott, Arina, and Jack, along with their happy animals, opened their home and heart to me and made me feel home when it was really hard to feel so elsewhere. Thank you, Nicole!

My deepest thanks to the continuous support of my family and brothers Rifat and Shadi, who, despite the distance and the brutal circumstances of war and despair, have always been there for me, reminding me of my goal, of myself, and of what I can do. Their unconditional love and happy voices have always been the main reason for my strength and survival. I owe them more than words can tell. My mother Mayada Arabi was always supportive, loving, and generous with her heart and wisdom; her faith in me always made me stronger and grateful. Thank you, Mom!

My hearty thanks go to Diana Fattal, my sister, friend, and soulmate whose love and friendship were inspirational and strengthening. She wrote me constant letters and e-mails from Aleppo, where she always reminded me that home is waiting for me when I finish my degree.

Bashar Al-Zink, your support and presence in my life was one of the main sources of my strength and happiness. You always reminded me of myself and of my place in the world when I forgot. Thank you for being my anchor and soulmate through it all.

I thank my grandmother Ibtihaj Boustani, too, who left us in 2014. Her prayers and smiling face were the candle that warmed me in the cold long days of exile and loneliness. She was always in my reality and dreams, holding me tight and narrating to me stories about home and growing up to be a person who does good things for her people and community.

Last but not least, I give thanks for my father Giath, whose love, kindness, and compassion made me a humble person and whose encouragement for me to write and learn always reminded me of the constructive and healing power knowledge and creativity could bring to the world. Though he left us in 2013, but even now, you give heart to anything good I do or succeed in.

Abstract

This dissertation examines poetry of Da‘d Ḥadād, Sanieh Ṣālḥ, and Ryād Ṣālḥ al-Ḥsīn and the dominant role of place in their poetry. My dissertation is specifically interested in nonconformist modern Syrian poetry, especially women’s poetry and poetry focused on place and space. I approach my analysis from an interdisciplinary and comparative perspective and hence will draw on theoretical frameworks from Arabic studies, poetry discourse, and theory of place. Drawing on these different critical frameworks, my research analyzes representations of modern Syrian poetry with a focus on the writing of women and the poetry of nonconformity in its expression of individual anxiety in modern Syria, which, in turn, reveals the link between self and place. This dissertation explores the following questions: Why is place a useful critical lens to analyze non-conformist Syrian poetry, and why does place allow us to connect the poems to a critical posture? What is the relationship between place and poetic approaches to individuality?

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Introduction

In the 1960s and 1970s, the Arab world experienced changes in all aspects: It is an era that witnessed the Israeli invasion of Beirut and the dispersion of Palestinians across the countries that make up the Arab world, the western siege on Syria and Libya, the Lebanese war, the Yemeni civil war after the second Gulf War, and the Iran-Iraq war. All of these events influenced Arab life in general, and the Arabic literature of the period was no exception. The 1948 Palestinian Naqbah (“catastrophe”) and the “Six-Day” Israeli-Arab war of 1967 along with Israel’s ensuing occupation of the Golan Heights, the West Bank, and East Jerusalem led to an overwhelmingly shocking blow to Arab pride and identity (Hadawi).

In Syria, this period was followed by the dominance of the Baath party, which imposed restrictions on freedom of speech, assembly, and association and created a repressive political climate. Syrian literature, and poetry in particular, consequently had to face these dramatic changes in the political landscape. Such political damage was reflected in literature and poetry, as writers were not isolated from the cultural activity in their environment. My research analyzes the work of Syrian poets during this period and its aftermath using the critical lens of poetics and theory of place. Arabic has a long tradition of political poetry; poetry has also been an ongoing venue for women writers to express dissent. In this dissertation, I analyze modern Syrian poetry written between the 1970s and 1990s. Many Syrian women poets, influenced by specific ideas and concepts of “feminism,” stand as a good mirror for the sociopolitical positions of women in Syria,

including the types of difficulties they faced and the repercussions of the women's rights movement. Though some of them belong to earlier historical periods, most of them can offer valuable insight into the cultural, political, and literary landscape of the late 1900s. The literature of the 1970s was marked as "adad al-iltizam," committed or engaged literature, due to its commitment to the concerns of the nation, Palestine, and the masses. Modern Syrian poets depart from the traditional form of writing and previously prevalent theme of nationalism and write instead with a high degree of simplicity, highlighting an intimate subjectivity and a swift spirit that tackles any taboo. It has been the voice of the collective conscience since the 1970s (Klemm 51-62).

In the decades following the 1970s, reality was tough and painful for Arabs; the masses retreated from streets. Mottos fell flat, the aesthetic sphere was marginalized, and the national cause became dull and trivial. The efforts of people were limited to surviving and to finding balance in days that felt like floods of crisis. Thus, there was an ideological shift during this period: It was the decline of Arab nationalism and the rise of Syrian nationalism, as embodied in Baath politics.

My dissertation is specifically interested in nonconformist modern Syrian poetry, especially women's poetry and poetry focused on place and space. I approach my analysis from an interdisciplinary and comparative perspective and hence will draw on theoretical frameworks from Arabic studies, poetry discourse, and theory of place. Drawing on these different critical frameworks, my research will analyze representations of modern Syrian poetry with a focus on the writing of women and the poetry of nonconformity in its expression of individual anxiety in modern Syria, which, in turn, reveals the link between self and place. In this dissertation, I trying to answer the

following questions: Why is place a useful critical lens to analyze non-conformist Syrian poetry, and why does place allow us to connect the poems to a critical posture? What is the relationship between place and poetic approaches to individuality?

Additionally, it is hoped that this work will help answer the following broad questions: What are the, social, cultural and literary, characteristics of the Syrian poetry studied? Is this poetry a genuine or accurate representation of the Arab poetry of the same period? What is the significance of the collected conclusions in this research concerning modern Arabic poetry, poets, society, and culture?

It seems, to the best of my findings, that no academic research has explored the modern Syrian poetry and poets that are discussed and analyzed in this dissertation. However, there are some studies that approach modern Arabic poetry, including modern Syrian poems; however, none cover the era and particular poets that are centered in this research. Additionally, as most of the poets that I analyze in this dissertation have not had their poems translated into English (and other languages), much of these poets' works have not been seen or studied by scholars who do not speak Arabic. Thus, this dissertation will also provide an initial glimpse into these poets' body of work in English and will help contextualize their writing within the Syrian landscape.

Traditional scholarship about Arabic poetry frames the experience of poets in terms of the political and the social events of Arab nationalism and commitment to the "*ilitizam*" literature that informed and formed twentieth century Arabic poetry. Modern poetry started as a revolt against traditional poetry, claiming that the latter did not appeal to the new intellectual and aesthetic needs of the period, particularly because the contemporary age is one of science, democracy, and freedom. A renovating spirit

emerged in that era, distinguishing itself with its respect of people's individuality and their ideological and intellectual uniqueness.

In this dissertation, I am specifically interested in analyzing the context of the place and how place is connected to expressions of anxiety and loss in modern Syrian poetry. Poetry is unique as it echoes the traditions of a language whose words combine connotations and emotions, a language that seeks to reconstruct our psychological world and that leads us to a realization that to be human means to experience both pain and joy.

I have chosen three leading poets whose poems are representative of the two movements and whose critical writings cover the key issues of their “new poetry”: Ryād Ṣālḥ al- Ḥsīn (1954-1982), Sanieh Ṣālḥ (1935-1985), and Da‘d Ḥadād (1937-1991), whose simple yet evocative language contain the impenetrable echoes of the cries of the Syrian people around them. I chose these poets for a number of reasons: (1) They are contemporaries belonging to approximately the same generation and historical era; (2) none of them experienced the critical reception or fame they deserved at the time they were published due to their nonconformity; (3) all of them adapted the free-verse style and shunned traditional poetic forms; and (4) all of them discovered new themes and artistic realms and were involved in writing about the apprehensions of the modern Arab citizen. Additionally, these poets have not been studied in detail and their poems did not reach the public till later.

My research will focus on the new presentations of modern Syrian poetry, both through direct textual references and through its subtle assertions. In Chapter One, I will discuss the rise of modern Arabic poetry, the elements that led to its emergence, and the sociopolitical and literary environment that formed the three poets discussed later in the

dissertation. In Chapter Two, I use the works of Sanieh Ṣālḥ and Da‘d Ḥadād to discuss modern Syrian women poets of the area, arguing that through its accessible language and focus on minute details and emotions, Syrian women’s poetry surpassed the ideological language and approach that dominated modern Arab poetry at the time. I also argue that by departing from the Arab nationalist and politically committed writing that prevailed in the literary landscape, these poets were freed to write poems that offered an empathetic lens toward the suffering and joys of their fellow people. Chapter Three focuses on Ryād Ṣālḥ al- Ḥsīn’s, whose works such as *The Destruction of Blood Circulation* (1979) and *Simple as Water, Clear as a Bullet* (1982) use everyday language and a range of real and unreal landscapes not only to discuss loss and injustice in a Syrian context but, unlike many modern poets of the time, to also shift toward visions and love and hope, creating an ideal to which readers could aspire. Through writing for and about the people, these poets and other modernist contemporaries revolutionized the Syrian poetry landscape, creating a body of work that both reflects and resists Syrian narratives of conflict, home, exile, resistance, and resilience.

Chapter One

Historiography of Modern Arabic Poetry

This project arises from a desire to translate modern Syrian poetry into English, especially that of Da‘d Ḥadād, Sanieh Ṣālḥ, and Ryād Ṣālḥ al- Ḥsīn, and to see their work read and introduced to a non-Arabic speaking audience. My project will progress from an introduction to modern Syrian poetry and the rise of the prose poem to discussions of Ḥadād’s and Ṣālḥ’s work; finally, I will explore and discuss Ḥsīn’s writing and his contribution to the Modernist movement. In this dissertation, I argue that Syrian poetry of the 1970s to 1990s is a recreation of space and space-creation that works to defy the limited political, ideological, and social spaces imposed by authorities.

This dissertation is a study of modern Syrian poetry, with a focus on the themes it carries as well as on poets who were nationally neglected and kept away from the masses, for reasons I will explore in the following chapters. This chapter aims to examine leading poets and poetic movements that made great contributions in introducing and establishing the Syrian free verse and prose poem, or “new poetry,” as Abd as-Sabur, Adonis, and other critics call the forms. Understanding the theoretical aspect of Arab free verse and the prose poem is indispensable to the understanding and appreciation of these new poetic experiments, especially as the writers of “new poetry” touch upon the very nature of their experiments and poetry as an art form.

The Origins of Modern Arabic Poetry

Poetry has long been considered the food of the Arab spirit, the place that gathers its stories and documents its sorrows, in times of war, celebration, loss, and victory. It was “the register of Arabs which preserved the annals of their history; their battles, their national achievements, and the glory of their rulers” (Jayyusi 45). Poets wrote about the victories and achievements of their tribes, and when a poet excelled, his tribe would celebrate him and brag of his importance among other tribes. Thus, poetry was connected with the glorification of a tribe and affected the tribe’s perceived importance among other tribes. In fact, poets’ importance occasionally surpassed that of the leaders of their tribes. al-Jāhiz, the prominent Arab writer notes that “Arabs were not honest in their glorification by relying on rhymed poetry and words. This was their *diwan*¹ because poetry serves the virtue of clarification.” Because a line of poetry could lift the importance of a tribe or bring it down, enemies sometimes tried to befriend poet’s tribes for fear of being satirized. From glorifying victories in battle to vilifying the enemy, poets and poetry were of key importance to both within and outside their tribes.

The primary name of a poem in the Arab world had been *al qasida*, which describes a work of writing made of symmetrical lines that have a definite number of feet, that rhyme according to a musical pattern (*wazn*), and that include a single rhyme that every line has to end with in the same poem. There were many forms of those patterns which led to a whole field in Arabic literature called *al- ‘arūd*²(the science of pattern). Arabic poetry traditionally followed this form from the first known Arabic poems until the beginning of the twentieth century, when poets started deviating from the

¹ Diwan: poetic works or collections of poems.

² Science of poetry, prosody.

classical form of writing *al qasida* and invented different ways of shaping poems without relying on well-known patterns.

Part of this change was connected to changing socio-political structures. After the collapse of the Ottoman Empire in 1916 and the end of a brutal era of British and French colonialism in the region (1923-1946), the social and the political scene changed rapidly in the Arab world. For example, in Egypt,

the medieval view which had dominated until well into the nineteenth century and which regarded writing as either morally and spiritually edifying or else entertaining through mastery of language and verbal skill, gradually gave way to the attitude that literature should reflect and indeed change the social reality (Badawi 15).

Similarly, throughout the region, the aftermath of independence and the end of colonialism changed every aspect of society and individuals' lives. This further affected the literary scene and forced it, willingly or unwillingly, to entertain new ideas and accept challenges, to deconstruct notions of identity and place, and to confront the new enforced reality, which it had to deal with or succumb to.

The free verse movement of poetry rose out of this context in the mid-1900s. Free verse liberated poetry from the rhythmical arrangements of old poetry. Poets al-Malā'ikah and al-Sayyāb found in free verse a new method for writing poetry, and they launched the movement with vigor and faith. In contrast with *al qasida*, modern Arabic poetry does not focus on symmetry and balance or rely on fixed number of feet. The single foot is the unit of a poem, with varied rhymes or even without a rhyming scheme. Al Jayyusi states that "free verse as a movement started in 1949 with the publication of Nazik al-

Malā'ikah's collection *Ashes and Shrapnel*," for which the author includes an introduction that attempts to explain the advantages of the new forms of poetry writing (13). In *Shazaya Wa Ramad* (*Ashes and Shrapnel*, 1949), al-Malā'ikah justifies the necessity of liberating poetic forms from older styles of writing that relied on stanzas, poetic meter, and other such techniques. Specifically, al-Malā'ikah expresses her faith in the necessity of a poetic revolution and appears ready to accept the results of such a change, noting that

Arabic poetry is standing today at the edge of a great shift that will not preserve anything from the old methods. Its rhymes, patterns, trends, and ways will all deteriorate. Its expressions will widen to embrace new horizons through strong terminology, and the poetic experiences will delve into the inner self after soaring around it from afar. (4)

Thus, encouraged by al-Malā'ikah and other poets, the modern Arabic poetry movement adopted a poetic practice that overlooked formal styles, instead emphasizing both symbolism, as in the poem "Ela Za 'era" (To a Guest) by Mahmoud ḥasan Ismail, and Surrealism, bringing together poetry and dreams and paving the path to subconscious writing. As Mwafi writes, poets who ascribe to free verse "consider free verse to be of a form before anything else, of a closed unit, a circle or a semi-circle and not a straight line. But rather a group of chains that are organized in a sophisticated net of a definite technique and a compound structure of organized patterns, dominated by consciousness which monitors the poetic experience and leads its direction" (12). In this way, free verse poetry became an artistic construction that offered a new direction toward

realism and everyday life that crushed both the fluidity of romanticism and the literary ivory towers and stiltedness of classicism.

The appearance of the beginnings of this movement and the support it received from poets who are skilled in poetic rhyming and who excel in the use of its variations garnered some inspiration from the Arab literary movement's familiarity with foreign literature. In particular, critics speculate that part of the motive behind Arabic women poets seeking new poetic experiences was an attempt to penetrate the depth of the psyche of a society that was and is not accustomed to women's honesty in expressing their feelings. Women writers found in modern poetry a new sphere for discovering themselves, which freed them from the heroic, male-dominated stories that are common in men's/masculine poetry. Those heroic poems ruled in the era that followed Syria's and Lebanon's independence from Britain and France, a time that was rich with nationalist mottos and flashy stories; yet, most of that poetry became almost identical and repetitive during that time until it was emptied of its contemporary importance. Unlike the heroic, nationalistic poetry of the past, modern poetry was more interested in the self, its sufferings, and its aspirations. In fact, such poetry was called "Whispering Poetry"—evoking images of its quiet inward gaze, like a monologue the poet is compelled to speak (Qabsh, 236). In the beginning of this wave, women used writing to express their feelings and describe their private worlds. For example, in the "Night Lover" by al-Malā'ikah, an isolated woman chooses solitude and silence over self-talk, and through the simple language used by the poet, doing so seems quite natural. Henceforth, women poets in many ways became more daring than their male counterparts and often focused on analyzing their inner minute details and most personal desires (17).

The change in topic that accompanied the introduction of free verse to modern Arabic poetry was also accompanied by a change of form. Poets sought to get rid of the strict form in both the poem and *muwaššah*.³ The new forms granted expansion to phrases and to the exploration of images without giving up the use of rhymes. Pioneering Iraqi poets like Nāzik al-Malā'ikah, Badr Shākir al-Sayyāb, and Abdul Wahab Al Baiati were the messengers of this literary revolution. The first step was their abandonment of rhyme and varying the stanzas in one line. What distinguishes this movement from those of earlier times is its reliance on the new poetic form, which became a literary trend and not a mere, sudden innovation. Modern poets believed in the value of this comprehensive alteration, and its enthusiastic members found that this form was the best way to record and share the human experience.

The Theoretical and Practical Formation of Modern Arabic Poetry: Movements and Influences

By the second half of the nineteenth century, the propitious signs of modern Arabic poetry appeared, though the changes were slight in the beginning. Yet, those new trends were strengthened over time until a total transformation was completed during the twentieth century that resulted in entirely new forms and literary trends in modern Arabic poetry. The existing schools of poetry affected the crystallization of these new schools and helped to stabilize and strengthen them by providing values and traditions from their international heritage. Al Diwan, *Apollo*, Al Mahjar, al-Rābiṭah al-Qalamiyah and the

³ *Muwaššah* is the name for both an Arabic poetry form and a secular musical genre. The poetic form consists of a multi-lined strophic verse poem written in classical Arabic usually consisting of five stanzas, alternating with a refrain with a running rhyme.

Andalusian 'oşba and the poetry magazine *Shi'r* are some of the most famous schools during this time period. They introduced theoretical dimensions, which were followed by practical components. The poets and critics of these movements were writing in support of that critical vision.

Restoration School

The restoration school is represented by Mahmoud Sami al-Baroudi, Ahmed Shawqi, and those who followed them, such as Ḥafez Ibrāheem, Aḥmad Muḥarram, Aziz Abaza, Mahmoud Ghaneem, Ali Al-Jundi, and others. This school followed the Abbasid-period, where the reader would feel Abi Tamam, El Bouhtouri, Abu at-Tayyib al-Mutanabbi, and al-Sharif al-Radi in their poems. Thus, its restoration is driven from imitating the most sublime forms of poetry at the era of the artistic flourishing, especially that of the Abbasid period.

The most creative poets in the restoration school are Al Baroudi and Shawqi, especially because of their neat readings of poetic tradition and the influence it had on their works; their talent enabled them to produce new poetry that had not been read by the modern poetry reader. Some poets of the restoration school, including Ali Al Laithi, Safwat Al Saati, and Abdullah Fekri relied on linguistic craft and excessive usage of artistic templates at the wrong time. However, their writing was limited to sending congratulations regarding a child's birth or a note to a friend, and it lacked experience and artistic honesty. Arabic poetry, hence, was far from the original forms it took with writers like al Baroudi.

The school of restoration and renovation was the daughter of the "*ba'th*" movement in literature, religion, and thought. Numerous important books were published

by Al Aghani, Nahj Al Bourda, Maqamat Badee Al Zaman Al Hamazani, and Mohammad Abdo, who had taught in their books to the Azhar students and Dār al-‘ulūmones the comprehensive awakening in all shapes of life—connecting them to the new culture, publishing magazines and journals, and expanding better education. Al Baroudi expresses the experience of exile in his poems and left his book *Dīwān al-Bārūdī* (1975) that established the beginning of a poetry renaissance, which made him a pioneer in the school of restoration. Ahmed Shawqi, on the other hand, in his traditional tendency, went further than al-Bārūd with his poetic theatre, educational stories, and his national and Islamic poems. His French education was dominant in his poetic usage that continued from the point where al-Bārūd stopped. Shawqi had read Jean Racine and Jean de La Fontaine, and was influenced by Shakespeare in his poetic theatre. Yet, it seems that al-Bārūd did not go further than the musical poem, even in his poetic theatre. Apparently, he made of his theatre a modern Souk Okaz⁴, where the characters of his play exchange poems in a loud musical tone.

al-Diwan School

al-Diwan (The Register) is a movement that refers to a book written by the critic 'Abbās Maḥmūd al-'Aqqād; and Ibrahim Abdul Qadir al-Mazini in 1921. Abdel Rahman Shokry participated in establishing this group, which was a pioneer generation that followed Shawqi, Ḥafez Ibrāheem, and Khalīl Muṭrān. This group was provided with knowledge and Western education, which introduced them to literature in other languages. At the same time, they also read works in translation. They invited self-expression by liberating poetry from the noise of life and its chaos, inviting a formative

⁴ Diwan: poetic works or collections of poems.

union in poetry where a poem becomes a whole work, varying the meters and liberating poems from a single meter, considering meaning and philosophy, visualizing the core of things and avoiding surface appearances, and portraying nature and contemplating in what it hides.

Passion and tendency to write with eloquence (intrinsically) are derived from the musical beauty of Arabic and its versatility. The morphological structure and nature of Arabic allow it to be open to various rhymes and rhythms, enhancing its potential for political and musical production. Besides, the numerous stylistic variations whether or not they rhetorically enable Arabic to deliver precise layers of meaning to whatever the writer is portraying (Jayyusi 37).

Arab women writers from countries like Lebanon, Syria, and Egypt were concerned about the condition of women in a patriarchal society that is dominated by various forms of oppression manifested in repressive traditions and a society that found it difficult to relate between women and men in different levels. Aisha al-Taimuriya (1840-1902), Warda al-Yazigi (1838-1924), and Zainab Fawwaz (1850-1914) produced literature in the form of poems, articles, and essays that voiced their opinions about many issues relevant to the time.

Yousef El Khal

Yousef El Khal is one of the most influential names in the history of Arabic poetry. In his autobiography, he wrote: “When it comes to my life until now, I am very happy to meet my creator with a poetry movement in my right hand which changed the path of Arabic poetry to the better” (Saleh 173-174). Some critics see the Bayan of Yousef El Khal, published in 1957, as the demarcation mark for this “alternative poetic

consciousness.” Yousef El Khal criticized the deteriorating situation of poetry in Lebanon especially, writing that

[c]urrent Lebanese poetry is traditional Arabic poetry, which is behind its age. In both cases, it is not modern poetry. The features of this poetry do not differ from traditional Arabic poetry. The classical poetry is the same, the unit of the stanza is the same, the pattern and the rhyme have not been modified. The old poetic aims are similar to the current ones despite some attempts in theatre, stories, and epic. In addition, looking at things on the unit “kiyanieh” experience in life[,] which is very important exporting an old commercial mentality. (al-‘zma 37)

The first Bayan of Yousef El Khal about modern Arabic poetry had to cope with the current age, the requirements of modernity, and their impact on the new Arab mentality. On the basis of this new term, a revolutionary poetic movement appeared in Arabic poetry. It followed modern poetry in other nations’ literature, and it produced poetry that had, for the first time, “an international nature, moreover, an international level, too” (al-‘zma 38).

That movement found many followers and participants, like Nazeer El Azmeh, Khalil Hawi, Adonis, Shawki Abu Shakra, Mohammad El Maghout, Fouad Rifka, Onsi El Haj, Khalida Saeed, Isam Mahfouz, and others. However, El Khal was one of the pioneers whose vision of poetry was not silent and still. Kalida Saeed, the Syrian critic and writer who followed the movement from the beginning, writes that

it developed because of his experiences and education, after the first stage that took place in the horizon of the Lebanese symbolism. His acquaintance with modern Arabic poetry in its various inspirations and his interest in reforming that

poetry—after his knowledge of the waves of modern poetry in the Americas and England—had great influence. (15)

El Khal defines the basis of modern poetry in nine main aspects: expressing life, extracting expressions from it, improving rhythm, unifying experience, the centrality of human beings, consciousness about Arabic Truth, understanding the European Truth, benefiting from world poetry, and blending with people's spirits (Naser, Moyasar 49). Some of these aspects are related to the culture of the poet while others are internal—related to the content of a poem, its expressions, rhyming, and structure. In a lecture he presented at the “Lebanese Nadweh” in January 1957 entitled “The Future of Poetry in Lebanon,” El Khal visualizes the responsibilities of a poet in three major categories: to be concerned about the human and the human experience, to refuse submitting to the past and its traditions, and to be liberated from any inherited or previously dominant authority. Thus, modern poetry, in El Khal's perspective, is the human, modern, rejecting, and liberated person.

Modern Literary Journals

One of the most important figures who started the movement of poetry innovation in Egypt was Ahmad Zaki Abo Shadi, the founder of the literary magazine *Apollo*. He called for a new poetic style, which he called “the free verse” (12). Ahmad Zaki Abu Shadi (1892-1955) formed *Apollo* magazine in 1932, which was a revolutionary step that brought original ideas like experimenting with new topics and even writing in forms different from the traditional *qasida*.

The Lebanese literary journal *Shi'r* was the cradle of modern Arabic poetics. Launched in 1957, *Shi'r* created a distinguished intellectual and artistic atmosphere that

differed drastically from previous movements and trends and invited new forms of writing that allowed writers to present their voices and writing in innovative ways and shapes, regardless of the defined frame of *qasida* or the classical literary styles that dominated poetry until then. *Shi'r* specifically was interested in the *qasidet al nather* or “free verse poetry,” and they were the first to publish Onsi El Haj, Yousef El Khal, and Shawqi Abu Shakra, among others.

Shi'r presented its revolutionary literary agenda in different ways, including publishing studies and critiques of modern Arabic poetry that adopted free verse, publishing theoretical poetry studies and poetry books that were written in prose poetry form, and publishing translated works. *Shi'r* helped spread the free verse poem by stressing the new concepts that serve free verse, such as using new musical formations that broke from the old classical rhythms allowed, writing and reading poems as closed and complete visions, and abandoning deconstruction that precedes the form.

Because of different factors that hastened the spread of *Shi'r*'s concepts among the Arab literary scene, the atmosphere of *Shi'r* (and the school of thought that grew with it) was suitable for activating different visions and innovative energies more than any preceding atmosphere. While the popularity of free verse poetry was on the rise, classical Arabic poetry was on the decline, particularly because it failed to express and connect with contemporary realities. The new poetry distanced itself from the musical descriptions of its predecessor, as poets sought to create literary works that captured their lived experiences. *Shi'r* made space for this poetry to be published and distributed, overlooking rhythm and rhyme in its poetry selections, which was a major step in the formation of the free verse poem. Many poets in the 1950s still preferred to write in the

verse form; most of those writers were realist and Communist poets who not only adopted the verse form in their writing but also adopted it in their performance and atmosphere (*al jaw*), such as Abdul Wahab Al Biati, Nazeer Tameh, Jabra Ibrahim Jabra, and others, whose writing was distinguished by the simplicity of their poetic sentence in the diction and structure that could make it readable by poetry readers in general. Departing from the classical poem was one aim of the *Shi'r* and its poets.

El Khal and other writers needed tools and a sphere in which to publish and gather their writings and creativity. *Shi'r* not only included analysis and comparative studies but also introduced readers to Western theories and work and to writings that were influenced by modern Western poetry. This represents a pioneering work in El Khal's experience, "In 1947, Moaysar, who is well-known for his strong passion for literature and pioneering experimentation in writing and experimentation, published a small collection of Surrealist poetry with Ali Nasser called *Sourial*,⁵ which included observations that reflect an independent mentality that did not rely completely on western theory. In this collection, the authors relied on automatic writing to a large extent, adopting in this one of the most extreme faces of surrealism" (Jayyousi 211).

Nasser and Moyassar's book *Sourial* includes 55 prose poems. Arokhan Moyassar started this book with an introduction and ended with a conclusion, which indicates his being the main facilitator for the form of this collection. Additionally, the introduction and the conclusion are not less important than the book itself; the title of the book, *Sourial*, announces its belonging to the Surrealist school that dominated Europe in the interwar period in poetry and painting and was later transferred to the east across the

⁵ "*Sourial*" in Arabic is derived from the English word "Surreal."

Egyptian Surrealism school, which included a number of poets and artists. Al Jayyusi suggests that *Sourial* represented the first attempt of its kind in Eastern Mediterranean countries. However, Surrealism and Modernism in their true senses appeared in Egypt in the 1930s before they did in Syria and Lebanon (Jayyusi 211).

The acknowledgment in their book is based on the “ego,” which indicates returning to the self and making self-concerns the first components of the experience of writing: “To that insatiable ego that does not see, whose perseverance is a deformed creativity which it presents to its full-of-deformation altar, to rest later on in a happy moment full of enjoyment and tranquility, where it gathers its strength, to create another deformed being” (12). The ego here is avaricious, yet that nature comes from within since it does not see the outside; instead, it sees it internally, and this is how it creates its monstrosities, or mutants.

In the introduction of his poem “To Azer” (1962), Khalil El Hawi writes, “I was an echo of collapse in the beginning of struggle, till I became mere noise of collapses when its stages were prolonged” (2). Contemporary Arabic poetry suffers from melancholia and split personality, which seems like an objective and a personal dilemma that represents Arabic experience and the tragic and disastrous age. Voices in modern Arabic poems multiplied to represent voices of differences, authorities, and those who opposed one another, in addition to the conflict between the past and the future. The conflict between the ego and the poetic ego becomes the most striking feature of the contemporary poem. The plight of this conflict includes revelation and denouement, both for the individual and the group and in confrontation with time. This conflictual ordeal makes the poem run from the inside to accommodate the outside, and returns it to the

inside to a dialogue between the “I”/ego and the self: to fight with the self, to oppose it, and to marginalize parts of it. The contemporary Arabic poem delves into the manifestations of existence (the crisis of the soul and the secrets of existence). These poems keep attempting to deconstruct the common classical patterns in order to produce the verse poem, which is not isolated from the chaos that surrounds it.

Global Influences on Modern Arabic Poetry

In that era of flourishing modern Arabic poetry that started in the 1950s, Arab artists and writers acquainted themselves with European poetry, though they did not imitate the realism that dominated European literature at that time. Instead, they experimented with new writing tools, whether it was surrealism, neo-romanticism, or realism. An example of this is the translation of the poem “The Lake,” which was translated in different forms in the eastern and the western parts of the Arab world. Some of the famous translations of it are that of Ahmad Hassan Al-Zayyat, Ali Mohammad Taha, Ibrahim Naji, and Nichola Fayyad.

The Romantic movement in European literature was a revolution against Classicism. However, those who invited romanticism into the Arab world were not always praised for it because they were considered by some critics as traitors and conspirators who represented colonialism against their own countries and people. Classical Arab writers, in particular, saw the “colonial” in the new wave of romanticism as well as an attempt to deform Arab culture and tear the Arab union apart. As the critic, poet, and histoian Amīr Shakīb Arslān writes, “Among those writers are some who seek to destroy the nation in its language and literature as a service to the European civilization” (12).

The accusation is that Arabic poetry is oblivious to the main task of romanticism, which was the deconstruction of classical literature, not only in literature, but in deconstructing the understanding of state, religion, politics and society. What modern Arab writers admired in European Romanticism was its global element, which sought to liberate the self.

However, for the Lebanese poet and academic Khalil Hawi, one of the problems of Arab poets is the use of symbolism that they borrowed from the West and forced into Arabic poetry, as the poet s'īd 'ql did in his writing. In Hawi's opinion, the biggest mistake was in "bringing foreign concepts and implementing them in the Arabic cultural soil, where they would not root or flourish" (33). This applies as well to Arab poets, who were fascinated with surrealism and did not pay close attention to the psyche of the nation. Hawi did not see any poet, among Modern Arab poets, who noticed the Surrealists' usage of Heraclitus in continuity or Sigmund Freud's in emphasizing and praising the role of instincts. Those poets tried to be "romantic from the outside till that romanticism became pale and fake" (33).

In evaluating poetry, Hawi describes vigor as the basic criteria, whether it is creativity or mere borrowing from outside, which is a falsification for him. The Syrian poet Adonis, for Hawi, lacks that vigor, resulting in a domination of the intellectual tendency in poetry, "one of the greatest blights that came to poetry is the independence of the intellectual tendency in poetry, which is evidence of the absence of poetic vigor to many" (33). Though Adonis is considered to be one of the main figures of modern Arabic poetry, for Hawi, Adonis is not a creative poet. As evidence of his opinion, Hawi presents

the literal imitation of Adonis to Henri Michoux's writing, referring to Adonis's collection *The Book of the Five Poems* (34).

Hawi does not tend to theorize about poetry but describes that he simply sees in it "a vision" that enlightens an experience; for Hawi, poetry is an art that is capable of personalizing and representing both of art and poetry simultaneously (36). That vision is "a penetration through the daily reality and the psychological conditions to which it deeply connects" (37). The sincerity of poets and their personal, national, and humanitarian realities help in every age in producing rich visions in their writing.

The focus on the "human" and the everyday distinguishes modern Arab poetry from previous movements. Yet, even though it focuses on everyday details, modern Arab poetry transcends the individual lives of people to speak to the essence of the whole human experience.

The Rise of the Arabic Prose Poem

Though these new experimentations and movements in poetry had appeared in early and mid-twentieth century, the term "prose poem" was not introduced until 1950s, when the Syrian poet Adonis read Suzan Bernard's *The Prose Poem from Baudelaire till the Current Time*, which was first published in Paris in 1959. In her book, Bernard analyzes the infinite creativity of poets, discusses the innumerable forms of writing they can produce, and posits how a single poem can generate smaller poems; she further suggests that prose poems do not need to rely blindly on the ready-formed templates and frames that were followed by all recognized classical poets. In 1960, a few months after the appearance of Bernard's book, Adonis published an article in *Shi'r* called "About the Prose Poem." Like Bernard in France, Adonis was the first person in the Arab world to

call that new poem a “prose poem.” Moreover, Adonis published his own prose poem “A Pathos the First Century” in the same issue. Following suit, Onsi El Haj published his first prose poetry book *Lan* (Will Not) in 1960 as well, which he opened with an introduction that included the basic concepts of Suzanne Bernard’s description of prose poetry.

With publications like *Shi’r* creating space for and nurturing such experimentations, the poets Onsi el Haj, Adonis, and Yousef El Khal tried to establish the primary terms of prose poetry despite knowing that creating something stable could hinder vision and renovation. They defined features of prose poetry that contained their principles for writing and revolution. For them, the prose poem must be generated from a conscious perspective, be organized, and be well-constructed in order to be an independent unit. This is what distinguished it from poetic prose, which is but a material; the unity of a poem is the vital feature of the prose poem. It is a unique artistic construction; this poem does not have a goal outside of it, whatever it might be. Unity and density are important, and it has to avoid detailed explications, clarifications, and anything else that could lead it to other prose forms (Salam 8).

For many critics, the prose poem is as much defined by form as by content. The Syrian critic Mahmoud Barot views the prose poem as close to the aesthetics of life, expressing a new perspective in the poetry of the 1970s, the aesthetics of which are based on a search for prose that emphasizes poetic language that exists outside of rhetoric and vision. In other words, in these prose poems, life feels like the “dreams of familiarity” (33) that French philosopher Gaston Bachelard discusses in his *Poetics of Place*. “Prose” does not have a literal meaning here but an aesthetic one, indicating the aesthetics of

documenting lived experience and capturing details that reflect the realities and desires of the “little human” who is marginalized. The Syrian poet Ryād Ṣālḥ al- Ḥsīn’s poetry offers an example of that “little human” with his/her relationships, experiences, moments, and feelings. This human is “the child and that woman,” “the soldier,” “the artist,” “the man,” “the boy/girl,” and the “tired man who returned home” (9). This “little human” is the real hero in the realms of the prose poem, even if those realms are small and quotidian.

The Western definition of prose poetry is not different from the Arabic one, yet the latter started from the departure point of the former when the Syrian poet Adonis introduced the term to the Arabic-speaking world in 1960. Soon, other poets added their voices to the growing understanding of the Arabic prose poem, including Anis El Haj in the introduction to his book *Lan* (Will Not) and Fakhri Saleh in the Egyptian magazine *Fusool* (Seasons). However, the definition of the prose poem that they developed is not completely equivalent to the Western definition because Arabic poets redefined the form, deconstructing and reconstructing it constantly in their creative writing, critical essays, and theoretical discussions (al-dib‘ 307).

To conclude, the environment that surrounded Arab poets in the late 1900s had a direct influence on their writing, especially with the major issues that preoccupied Arabic thought and culture—dictatorship and freedom, which are related to each other. Those issues participated in creating the collective political and cultural subconscious and greatly influenced the three Modernist Syrian writers I will examine in the following chapters.

Chapter Two

The Poet Who Carries Jasmine to Her Grave

People rely on relationships—with each other, the animal world, spirits and the Earth—to maintain well-being as people approach dangers that threaten them, and respond to sickness and troubles when they happen. These different approaches arise from the diverse ways that people understand the world.

–Wellstone Trust Gallery

Twenty-five years after her death, the Syrian poet Da‘d Ḥadād’s writing brings with its serene silence a voice that does not die. But how could that voice not be powerful when it echoes thousands of people throughout those years? And when it says with its quiet voice what grand slogans and mottos have failed to express? This chapter will delve into the narrative of space of Syrian women writers by exploring the writing of the Syrian poets Da‘d Ḥadād’s (1937-1991) and Snīa Ṣālḥ (1935-1985), who lived and wrote during an era in which non-conformist writers’ voices were often silenced. Despite such silencing and the social movements surrounding them, these poets found power in writing poetry that did not call for applause, fame, or support by government institutes and that did not resonate with the powers that wanted to shut down their efforts.

Da‘d Ḥadād: Cultivating Creativity in a Conflicted Landscape

After the defeat of Syria, Egypt, and Palestine by Israel in the Six-Day War in 1967, the hypocrisy of the political discourse and the poetic one that accompanied it and the gap between the intellectual, creative sphere and the seats of power and authority only

widened. Arabic writing during that period entered a stage of modernity and had to acknowledge, for perhaps the first time in modern literary history, its separation from both authority and its past linguistic form. Writing no longer referred to the crisis of the memory of Renaissance (Nahda) but instead to the necessity of getting rid of its twisted relations and collusion with authority, which had no place in Arabic poetry thereafter.

Ḥadād was a poet who brought a different kind of writing to the Arabic-speaking world in terms of form and content. She was born in Lattakia in 1937 to the famous and well-educated Al Ḥadād family and was the sister of director Mrwān Ḥadād and poet Nbīha Ḥadād. She started writing rhymed poetry when she was younger and then prose, like most of her contemporaries. In her childhood, Ḥadād used to read heavily. Talking about her journey with poetry, Ḥadād says in her *Complete Works*: “I wrote poetry early and started with classical rhymed poetry. Later on, I liberated myself from poetic meters and rhymes and went for free poetry. Sometimes, I write rhymed poetry, yet I do not know how to turn it into a prose poem” (3). Ḥadād was not only a poet, but she also had many other artistic interests, including drawing, sculpting, playing music, learning languages, and writing children’s stories. Though she was a student of Arabic Literature at Damascus University, she did not complete her degree. Ḥadād’s interests reflect the immense energy she had for life, achievement, and work and are evidence of the flow of creativity and her restless search for new tools in which she could explore intellectual and spiritual spheres.

Ḥadād has a special place in the Syrian poetry scene due to the level and style of her writing and because of the layers of tragedy that overwhelm her writing and reflect the gloomy and melancholic reality of Syrian life. In most of her poems, Ḥadād questions

her identity as a citizen living in Syria and as a woman with desires, dreams, passions, and visions of an alternate life and reality. Her poems not only reflect her world and dreams but also reflect the image of Syrian women in a particular political and social period—a time in which women were surrounded by a traditional, patriarchal culture dominated by a political authority.

Ḥadād's depression and melancholia are evident in her poems, in which she fights and confronts feelings of emptiness and loss of meaning. She says in one of her untitled poems,

أنا من تحمل الزهور إلى قبرها
أنا ابنة الشيطان..
أنا ابنة هذه الليلة المجنونة..
ابنة وعيي..
وصديقي.. أنا
أنا أكثر الناس عتقا..
أنا خمري في شرابيني..
أنا من تحمل الزهور إلى قبرها،
وتبكي.. من شدة الشِعْر⁶

I am the woman who carries flowers to her grave,
The daughter of the devil,
The daughter of this mad night,
The daughter of my consciousness,

⁶ All the translations of poems in the dissertation are done by me.

And my friend.

I am the oldest people

I am my wine in my veins

I am she who carries flowers to her grave

I am she who carries flowers to her grave

And cries from the intensity of poetry (20)

Ḥadād's writing shocked many readers at the time, as her poems contain sharp emotions and criticisms that target the most profound reality and thoughts of women at her time. "Closing of the Place" and "Waiting for Death to Correct Its Mistakes" are screams of an angry woman who waits for life. In contrast, Damascus in the middle of the 1970s was celebrating writing that portrayed the aging of the world and its tragic end.

Ḥadād's poetry and other Arab and Syrian writers in the 1970s and 80s brought with them alternative ways of expressing the self via new techniques of writing poetry in Arabic. The prose poem that appeared in the second half of the twentieth century embraced women's voices more than before, especially in poetry in which women's writing was liberated from the simple romantic style that used to classify women's writing in the Nahda (the Arab Renaissance); furthermore, the prose poem allowed women writers to be free from the concepts that restricted women's writing, allowing them not only to write about others but also to focus on personal problems or everyday emotional experiences that often connected to the larger social schema. In prose poetry, women's writing rebelled against the narrow horizons that restricted their creative writing and emphasized emotional narration.

The longstanding effects of the silencing of women’s voices by authority figures, including fathers, husbands, leaders, publishers, and audiences, changed after the turn of the twentieth century. As noted in *Modern Arabic Literature*, writers like ‘āisha al-tīmūrīa, Mlk ḥfnī Nāṣīf, and May Ziade bravely defied “the prevalent norms which dictated that well-bred women are to be seen and not heard” (Allen 133).

Ḥadād became one of a number of women writers who defied not only the patriarchal authorities but also restrictions placed on women poets and the subjects and styles through which they expressed themselves.

Throughout her writing career, she wrote three poetry books and many published and unpublished dramatic works. In 1981, Ḥadād published her first book, *Correcting the Mistake of Death*, after the death of her poet sister. In 1987, she published *A Crumb of Bread Is Enough for Me*, in which she explores the abstinence of Sufis and ascetics:

كسرة خبز تكفيني
أيّتها العيون المخملية
أنا الناسك المبتهج
والمجنون و الوحيد
أه ما أروع الحياة ..يا أصدقاء
ولي كسرتي المجففة بالشمس و الحرية
ولي مدفأة من تلج
و سترة حمراء...حمراء...ليست كالحة جداً
و ابنة أجمل من أولادي الآتين
و عتاب..عتاب شديد

و كوبان من الشاي الجيد

مع عفاريت المطبعة.

A crumb of bread is enough for me

no one can live in my grave

I am the woman who carries flowers to her grave and cries from the intensity of
poetry

close your eyes

I will pass alone as a sharpened spear (53)

A few weeks before her death, Ḥadād finished her third poetry collection *The Tree That Bends Toward the Ground*, which was published in 1991, months after she died. The following sections will examine some of the themes and concepts present in Ḥadād's poetic works and the ways in which they not only reflect Ḥadād's personal experiences with grief and loss but also her relationship to the Syrian landscape—which was filled with conflict, tension, and political and sociocultural strife.

(Dis)Location in Da' d Ḥadād's Poetry

In this section, I will try to examine and draw up the connections between place, practice, and affect and how these connections contribute to making the self. In *The Poetics of Space*, Gaston Bachelard writes, “home is our corner of the world,” a place of shelter, dreams, “enveloping warmth” and other “maternal features” (7). Further, Doreen Massey sees places as much “collective achievements as they are personal” (154). As she writes, we are changed by places we live in and those we encounter there, “[n]ot through some visceral belonging... but through the practicing of place, the negotiation of intersecting trajectories.” Places and the people who live in them are related.

“Topophilia” is a term coined by Yi-Fu Tuan that refers to the “affective bond between people and place” (Tuan 4). The most crucial element about the idea of place is the sense of attachment, which is related to the “field of care.” (148) Space for Tuan is an open field for motion and action. Place, instead of being stagnant, has to do with “value” and “belonging,” as well as “becoming involved.” Tuan notes that “[a]t one extreme, a favorite armchair is a place, at the other extreme the whole earth” (149). Edward Relph argues that place is what decides our reality, and awareness builds an affinity between the self and the world. Relph suggests that consciousness is not merely about something but something in its place. Indeed, for Relph, the sole way for humans to be is to exist “in place” (38). However, in this dissertation, the focus is on place in those poets’ writing.

To be human is to be in place. To the humanist, ontological necessity was given to the human engagement in place instead of the absorption of geometric space. The humanistic concept of place is indebted to Heidegger, who highlights “dwelling” as the most genuine reality. As Massey further writes, “To live is to live locally, and to know is first of all to know the place one is in” (18). David Seamon discusses home as a place and space: “Home is seen as a center of meaning and a field of care. Home is an intimate place of rest where a person can withdraw from the hustle of the world outside and have some degree of control over what happens within a limited space” (Seamon 18). In other words, home is where you can be yourself.

For Massey, place is a tool that helps us telescope and delve. She conceptualizes place as a practicing and a negotiation; indeed, literature is a sphere that grants place to ideas, by making them vividly alive through people’s experiences and lives. Ḥadād’s poetry uses the concept of “place” to redefine identity and reconstruct the notion of

citizenship in a country that barely seems like a place to which people belong—examining history, current cultural barriers and struggles, and her own humanistic concerns in the process. Exploring the spaces of Ḥadād’s poetry is crucial to understanding forms of identity and citizenship in modern Syrian poetry. The way we imagine space, for Massey, is not fixed. Space continues to happen; it differs and gives us different meanings, “but it carries with it social and political effects” (4). Place is generated in Ḥadād’s writing by the connotations of her words and through images of streets, houses, natural landscapes, and graveyards. Places for Massey are not those assumed by people as cities, parks, homes, theatres and other confined and theoretically divergent locations. She thinks of place in a more intangible way in its “particular constellation of social relations, meeting and weaving together at a particular locus” (322). Places for her express social relations, and this perspective relates to my analysis of Ḥadād’s poetry, because it fosters awareness about a place and offers an invitation to view it outside the local lens to be able to understand place better.

Geography is used in Ḥadād’s poems to stress estrangement from home and the pains of exile, and anguish and despair are core features of the places Ḥadād imagines. “Death” comes to her home, and she gazes at it from her window. Her mother in one poem is buried in a graveyard nearby while Ḥadād still notices the “smell of soil” on her clothes. In this poem, there are assertions of physical places, like “graveyard” and “house.” Yet, even “soil” refers to Earth, and thus a place, which indicates Ḥadād’s connection to soil and nature’s elements more than to physical places or her own homeland. Indeed, Ḥadād’s landscapes are often more closely linked to her moods and feelings than physical space, and images of death abound in her poetry. Still, while the

places she writes about are permeated by these images of death and fear, light still can come through through her memory and loved ones' spiritual presence with her. For example, in the poem noted above, even though time has passed and her mother is buried nearby, Hadād describes her mother's face as a "night lily / that weaves dresses for butterflies / on moonlight" (19), offering a soothing image in the midst of meditations on death.

In Hadād's poetry, places are continuously altering and changing. A place, as Edward Casey notes, is not "initiated as a foundation has to be—but eventual, something in process, something unconfined to a thing" (29). Indeed, place is "all over the place"—it is present and available everywhere, as is the case with Hadād's work. Place in Hadād's poems is constantly evolving, changing, and becoming. In one poem, she talks about children who passed away and were victims

هذه قبضة تراب

فوق أطفال...

ماتوا ليس فقط من الحروب،

بل من الوحدة و الجوع....

حفاة... عراة... يضحكون

في وجه الجلادين

This is a handful of soil,

Above children,

Who died,

not only of wars

but of loneliness and hunger

barefooted

naked and laughing

in the face of executioners (*The Tree that Bends Toward Earth* 20).

Here, she writes about a place that buries its children, a place of hanging and executions of innocence and of what home means. Pain, trauma, and loss are localized here and reflect the years of war, pain, and loss that Syria faced throughout its modern history.

The image of children recurs in her poems. Those children are supposed to be playing and enjoying their childhoods with joyful things; yet, they cry, and they are killed. Even the mountain they climb does not give them the colors and the happy possibilities they expected. Instead, they find “only fruitless astonished shrubs” (21):

و كان الجبل يرتفع كلما صعدوا ...

و حين وصلوا إلى القمة

لم يضربوا زجاج النوافذ ...

كانوا يدحرجون الحصى فوق البيوت القديمة المتهدمة

و يكون ...

The mountain was getting higher

With their climbing up.

They did not hit window glass

When they reached the top.

They were rolling pebbles towards

The old destroyed houses,
And they were crying (23, 24).

The unnamed city in this poem is one where children wake up with “fireworks” in their hands, which indicates the presence of a violent and warlike environment. Hadād wrote that one of those children used to write poetry on a park bench, musing on the moon after sunset, and dreaming of the sea and white swans. Yet, when that child became a young man, “the war killed him” (25). The city Hadād writes about is in a country where a word could end the life of its speaker if it stood in opposition to the ruling regime, and Hadād writes in her other books and poems that she does not find shelter or home in such places. Yet, she cannot simply cross her arms and watch the violence and aggression around her without writing about it. This is why I see her poetry as a statement of resistance and survival. What she says in poetry could not have been said in the Syrian parliament or school curriculum—and even Hadād’s poems were not taught or introduced in Syrian schools’ courses.

Imaginative place often replaces actual “lived” place for Hadād. She writes of the place she dreams about—for others, for children, and for herself. Yet, even in this dream, there is despair and melancholy. It seems that this imaginative place cannot happen soon because Hadād’s poem ends with a woman weeping over her children who left home and did not return. Maybe the salvation and hope are elsewhere in these poems, but they are certainly not in this dark and infertile city she depicts. Instead, this world is sad and melancholic; it is a hopeless place, where “butterflies” are asleep and children “barefooted,” where prayers and dreams are unrealized, and where the singer whose songs would normally lighten people's spirits is now silent. As the poem ends, Hadād

finds shelter in silence again, because even grandmothers' prayers, which have a powerful influence in Arab culture and heritage, remain unanswered here.

Home and images of longing for home are present in much of her writing, as she writes about war and destruction and the grief and pain that accompany war. This makes Ḥadād's poems appear to be situated outside of her local space, as if she is writing about another country or people. In a poem titled "Be Ready, the Mummification Tools are Ready," in *Correcting the Mistake of Death*, she asks people to empty their houses for a war or a slaughter might happen there. She narrates to us a scene of some war or a massacre that is about to happen or has just happened:

استعدوا.. استعدوا.. ألف مرة قلت.. استعدوا
..فالنوم لا يكون أبداً أثناء السقوط
..في حفرة
!وأخيراً.. ما أروع أن يكون لكم... مأوى

Be ready, be ready, one thousand times, I said: Be ready

Sleep does not happen during falling

In a hole.

At last, how wonderful is it to have a shelter! (15-16).

Ḥadād wrote a few poems in 30 pages of work that she did not publish. Those poems, according to *Al-Hiat*⁷ newspaper, were given to writer Louai Iadah. In some of those poems, Ḥadād introduces us to people who were forced to be absent, to be silenced, and to disappear from that place. "Home" also becomes a foreign place in Ḥadād's other

⁷ From *Al-Hiat* newspaper, January 18, 2002

poems, where she wonders about distances and spaces and evokes nightmarish
dreamscapes. She writes that she tries to decipher them:

ما هذه المسافات
والفراغات...؟
وأنا وحدي... أركض بلا
نهاية
لا شيء سوي الذهول واللامعقول،
لا شيء يحد من هذه المسافات
.....
لأتوقف

What are these distances and spaces?
while I am all by myself
running without an end
nothing but astonishment and the impossible
Nothing limits those spaces,
.....To make me stop.

There is no one by her side to stop her or give her a hand. She wonders about life, its walls, its gates, and its “kind Earth guards.” She is “growing sometimes / and getting smaller other times / even fences and thorns disappeared”; she does not know what this place is, if it is a desert “without sands” or if they are even in some kind of dreams from which they would wake up eventually. She does not know to whom she should give “all this beauty / while the world is wide and desolated,” while she is running without an end. The places in this poem are forsaken and empty and do not take one shape: of home,

work, or the place of dwelling. It feels as if she is walking in a foreign land where she knows no one or has no friends, evoking feelings of solitude and helplessness.

Scenes of graves dominate Ḥadād's poems; yet, there are allies, nights, and adventures, through which she confirms that she is the only tree that bends towards the Earth. The world collapses day after day, with its destructive force, its materialistic features, while people deform the world, in their turn, with their desires. Place becomes collapsed, the speaker is displaced, and new dreamscapes emerge that are still littered with destruction, death, and loneliness.

Death and Loneliness: The Costs of War

While Ḥadād represents a range of places and spaces in her writing, from natural settings to cityscapes, graveyards dominate many of Ḥadād's poems. A few weeks before her death, she finished her last book, *The Tree That Bends Toward the Ground* (1991). In this collection, she acknowledges her inclination to the ground, completing in this way what she commenced in her first project by asking questions about loneliness, pain, immortality, despair, love, and poverty. No one had answers for these questions; indeed, only her early death did.

Through her loneliness and isolation, Ḥadād tells about a legacy of colonialism and the death and violence that still haunt the landscape in which she lives and writes. As she writes in "The Story of the Night Guard," the first poem in *Correcting the Mistake of Death* (1981),

مساءً...أو ربما في الليل
في الحادية عشرة ربما...أكثر أو أقل،
غرقت في فراشي الوثير،

عفواً،

افترشت سترتي الكاكية،

أغلقت باب كوشي الأخضر الصغير،

و للحال،

تدلى من سقف الكوخ،

حزن صغير و ملحاح.

.....

لو أتت رسالة طائشة،

فجأة ، من نافذة قريبة،

فهي لا تصيبني ، إطلاقاً.

ففي هذه الحال،

أن يكون الحارس الليلي موجوداً ،

بل، الحزن المتدلي،

من كل السقوف المتفجرة..

In the evening, maybe at night,

Maybe at 11:00 p.m., more or less

I sank in my downy/soft bed,

Pardon me,

I put down my khaki jacket and closed the door of my small green cottage,

And to the situation that hangs from the ceiling

A little and a nagging sadness

.....

If a careless bullet,
Passes, by chance, from a near window,
It will never reach me.
In this case, the night guard won't be here,
But only the dangling sadness,
From all the explosive ceilings (7-9).

In this poem, Ḥadād speaks quietly about her loneliness in her imaginary soft bed in a small cottage. Though her voice sounds sad and lonely, she also brings the whole world to her small cottage as “a passing person” who stops by to “drink tea in the coming evening.” “The night guard” is not going to be there, and his presence is replaced by sadness, which is present in the possibility of bullets and the threat of violence under which Ḥadād was living at that time.

In the title poem of the book, “Correcting the Mistake of Death,” Ḥadād waits to have the mistake of death corrected by being absent, by asking others to not observe her or follow her while she leaves silently behind the red curtains. In this poem, there is a need to not exist, to be invisible and silent. Similarly, the profound melancholia and loneliness of Ḥadād is present in her other poems, including “I Am the Woman Who Carries Jasmine to Her Grave”:

أنا من تحمل الزهور إلى قبرها
أنا ابنة الشيطان..
أنا ابنة هذه الليلة المجنونة..
ابنة وعيي..
وصديقي.. أنا

أنا أكثر الناس عتقا..
أنا خمري في شراييني..
أنا من تحمل الزهور إلى قبرها،
وتبكي.. من شدة الشعر
.....
اغمضوا.. أعينكم،
سأمر وحيدة،
..كحد الرمح
..حين هطول.. دمو عكم

I am the daughter of the devil,
The daughter of this mad night,
The daughter of my consciousness
My friend is I.
I am the oldest people,
I am my wine in my veins.
And I am the woman who carries flowers to her grave
And cries ..cries..from the intensity of poetry.
.....
Close your eyes,
I will pass alone.
As a sharpened spearhead
When your tears fall. (*A Crumb of Bread Is Enough*, 6-7)

Ḥadād writes about lonely people who search in their dreams for what they have lost in life; she makes their dreams accessible in her poetry. Her poems present women who feed birds everywhere, take care of cats in their houses for twenty years, sing to stars in the cold, sad evenings, and share their loneliness with moons. As Ḥadād writes in her poem “I Write to the Moon”:

أرسل القمر ساعات...
أرسل الهواء الليلي...
أرسل الأيدي المتعبة و المعزولة...
و أتمرغ بالتراب و أنظر إليك...
و تتلوث ثيابي و أنظر إليك...
أتعفر...أتعفر...
و ها هو القبر...مرمية بثيابي...

I write to the moon

I write to the purple air

I write to the tired and isolated hands

I write with soil

and look at you

My clothes get stained with soil,

and I look at you

I am covered with soil, covered with soil

And here is my grave.... thrown with my clothes. (*A Crumb of Bread is Enough*,

11)

The poet's voice is immensely lonely—the woman of melancholic cities, who continues living wherever she corrects the mistake of death. This makes her poetry a poetry for forgotten and broken people, whom she describes in poem “The Lonely People”:

يبكون من الحب...
الوحيدون...
و يجرجرون الأكياس فوق الظهر...
و يملون الأوراق...
و فتات الموائد...
آه البكاء المشترك...
و الجنازات المشتركة...
و العويل...و العذابات المشتركة...
يا رغيف مكسيم غوركي المبلل!
و أنا لي رغيفي المسروق و المبلل...
كيف أنتزعه من مخزن الحرية...
و الحب.... أيضاً

They cry from love:

The lonely ones.

They drag bags on their shoulders

And collect leaves and feasts' scraps.

Oh! The shared crying,

The shared funerals,

The crying,

The shared suffering,
Oh! The wet bread of Maxim Gorky,
While I have my stolen and wet bread,
How could I snatch it
From the store of freedom (*A Crumb of Bread Is Enough* 21)

In her book *The Tree That Bends Toward the Ground* (1991), Ḥadād introduces a poem directed to a bird, asking it to “calm down” because “children are waiting,” “holding tales after playing.” No one accompanies those children, yet in that

فلتناموا جميعاً.
في هذا الليل المعتم....،
ثمّة عجوز تحمل عصاها.
فوق الثلج....
تتأمل زهرة وحيدة....
بعد المغيب.

dark night
there is an old woman who carries her stick
on snow
contemplating a lonely flower
after sunset (*The Tree that Bends Toward Earth* 15).

The place she writes about is not represented in an identifiable way, which makes it seem like any place we can imagine. Ḥadād replays images of darkness and loneliness in her poems, as if they are major features of her memory and surrounding environment. In an untitled poem, she writes about unattended people and loneliness that brings no one to

her door, yet she is not alone with all that is bestowed to her, like nature and animals.

Still, alienation is central even amid these natural images:

بين القبور...
كانت دمعة الطير...
تحرق التربة...
فتنبت زهرة بيضاء...
لا أحد يقترب منها...
و من يراها، تسكنه الوحشة...
و يبقى وحيداً...
طيلة العمر...

between the graves

the bird's tear was burning the soil

a white flower would grow

no one approaches it

alienation will inhabit whoever sees it

and they will stay alone

all their life (*The Tree that Bends Toward Earth* 16).

Between Silence and Speech

The themes and images of death that are ever-present in Ḥadād's poems also connect to Ḥadād's exploration of sound—and, in particular, speech and silence. In her 1981 poem "Listen Very Well," Ḥadād's silence does not signify death; instead, it means "I exist," that she can speak when she wants, and she chooses to be silent. Her silence means others have to listen. Heavenly and non-heavenly books, accompanied with the

stories of Earth as well as bird wings, and a flower, are all silent objects and situations— but not for Ḥadād, who gives them a voice whose strength surpasses the ears of the audience that she brings before those silent forces, ordering the audience to “[l]isten very well”:

أصيخوا السمع، حينما تتحدث الأرض...
عن تشقق تربتها،
و عندما تهب الريح لتقتلع التبلات...
التي لم تمهد طريقها..
أصيخوا السمع في جوف الأرض...
حينما يحرك العصفور، جناحيه المتعبين..
باحثاً عن عشه المتهدم بين الصخور النارية،
و الزهرة، عن لونها الأصلي، قبل أن يتحول إلى ...
أسود

Listen very well when the Earth speaks

About its cracked soil.

When the wind blows to pluck the petals

That did not wave to its road.

Listen very well to the heart of the Earth,

When the bird moves its tired wings,

Searching for its destroyed nest between fire rocks,

And the flower searches for her original color before it turns black (*Correcting the Mistake of Death* 47-48).

The French intellectual George Bataille suggests that we are structured as individual subjects by that silence which is outside of “me” and “you.” Our humanity, for Bataille, is constructed by a “middle term”—eroticism, sacrifice, and other elements—and we are made by that “nucleus of violent silence” (“Attraction and Repulsion II” 114; OC II 319). Silence is not a mandatory visitor, neither is it a sudden one; it is “always already” there, and it is meaningful and a form of language itself.

Death, loneliness, and isolation are persistent themes in Ḥadād’s writing. However, silence and death are intertwined in Arab culture, especially the cultural practices of mourning. Though this relation varies from one geographical area to another, it is meaningful in the sense that it signals the failure of spoken words to convey feelings and acknowledges silence’s power to say what goes unspoken. Indeed, there is a notable tension between silence, speech, and death in Ḥadād’s poetry. In her poem “Kill Me and Win a Dollar,” Ḥadād asks to be killed knowing that the killer has nothing to feel and nothing to be touched by. That does not matter, though, as she knows her death means she is winning her heart and freedom. The dollar her killer would win is what the killer is worth, while her priceless freedom would go with her to a place that cannot be framed by the dimensions or rules of the killer or other dominating powers. Her seeking death here is not giving up, as she is the winner, though a silent winner. She starts the poem talking about the world’s birds, which are looking for some warmth, while she is alone and does not own anything. Yet, she writes that she does have “freedom / and my heart / which is full of love” (22):

لن تذكرك طيور النورس، فوق سطوح الماء،
لا اللمسات العذبة للأشياء،

و الأبعاد الأسطورية،

فوق جبين العالم، قبر أبيض...،

اقتلني، و اربح دولاراً....

The seagulls would not remember you,

on the surface of water

Neither does the soft touch of things

or the mythical dimensions

A white grave is on the forehead of the world

kill me and win a dollar (*Correcting the Mistake of Death* 21-22).

She breaks her silence with empathetic acts of speech. By doing this, she is making connections to events that might occur after her death, like the hope we can trace in her poems to children and generations after her. Hadād's empathetic voice speaks to and for those who are lonely and grieving—criticizing those in power and vocalizing the cries of the “common people.” In one untitled poem, numbered “15,” Hadād describes a “quiet night rain / in the yard” with

قدمان عاريتان ...

و أغنية...

و هكذا، يمضي الجبل وحيداً عبر الزمن...

و القسوة لا تبني حضارة .

لكن المشاعر الكامنة...

فالأقدام المتشققة

تصنع المعجزات...

two barefooted legs
and a song
thus the mountain leaves alone
across time
cruelty does not make a civilization
feelings are hidden
and cracked feet
can make miracles (*The Tree that Bends Toward Earth* 22).

In this poem, songs are saviors, followed by people's steps. Mountains are symbols of strength and resilience, and in the Syrian dialect, the phrase "you're like a mountain" refers to strong people. Civilizations are not made with cruelty and inhumanity, even when leaders believe so. Instead, it is weakness and fragility with their humane shape that cultivate a society. The power of "harshness" is a destructive one, whereas feet and music are capable of making wonders, even if those feet are wounded and cracked. This poem paraphrases Hadād's philosophy about life and justifies the main focus of her poetry: weak and helpless people or the "common people." Hadād mocks authorities and lets her words about "executioners," "barefooted children," "hunger," "poverty," and "helplessness" flow; yet, she implies that cruelty does not create civilizations and that salvation is in the hands of those forgotten by the leaders of a civilization. In works like this, Hadād's poetry acts as a cradle for the victims she writes about; it is the place where they do not find cruelty or mistreatment, not because they are dead but because their freedom and weakness liberate them, and they have voices through Hadād.

Through the use of this kind of voice, Hadād's poems might be still trying to correct the mistake of death and resist the structures of power that have brought death upon the Syrian people. Scholars of humanity see power everywhere. Power for Foucault, for example, is a relationship and not an object or a thing; power and freedom do not have a simple relationship but are instead in a "permanent provocation" (342) in which they depend on each other. Hadād's poems are acts of resistance not only against those in institutional power but also against the compulsion to participate in such systems of power. As she narrates in her poem "Be Ready, the Mummification Tools Are Ready":

يعتصرون الأدمغة الاليكترونية،
بحثاً عن دور جديد،
يعتصرون فيه بؤسك المقبل،
ثم ينحني الممثل،
المقتول في الغد،
لغبائك القسري.
هذا عالمناء،
ارفع طفلك فوق الغيم،
قد يتلوث بالبيئة.

They squeeze the electronic brains,
Searching for a new role
To squeeze your coming misery with it.
Then the actor—who is killed tomorrow—
Bends for your compulsory stupidity.

This is our world,

So lift your child above the clouds,

The environment might pollute her. (*Correcting the Mistake of Death*, 11-12)

This poem looks like a statement of a protest or refusal, where the voice of the poet sounds louder than in other poems. Her writing is strong though it sounds contrary; it offers hope even in her waiting for death away from the careless eyes.

In her last book, *The Tree That Bends Toward the Ground* (1991), Ḥadād admits that she is the one who bends toward the ground, completing what she started with in her first book, by asking questions about loneliness, despair, love, poverty, and pain:

الشجرة التي تقاوم

دفع الريح...

الشجرة التي تميل نحو الأرض،

الشجرة الرؤوم...

تنفك عن أسرتها

الشجرة الأم،

تتبعثر

The tree that resists

The flow of wind.

The tree that bends towards the ground,

The tender tree

Is split from her family,

The mother tree

Is scattering... (*The Tree that Bends Toward the Ground* 47)

Ḥadād says about her poetry “my poetry goes towards good and beauty, it has a humanitarian nature which I direct to simple, poor, wretched people and those searching for freedom. In my poetry, I search for a continent of (utter freedom).” Her poems seek help from nature, walls, snow, stone and light: “the wall is cold, mother! The snow is coming / Here my voice is calling you / behind stones and soil” (38). In her poem “To Damascus,” she says:

لا شيء سوى الليل و العيون..
و الأضواء المتناثرة البعيدة..
و الاصطدامات الرقيقة..
و بحة صوت..
و كلاب ضالة وحيدة..
يا لصوت الأقدام تحت النوافذ....
تصبحون على خير أيها الأصدقاء..
تصبحون على خير
و فجر يأتي ندياً كالعادة..
و أحذية مفقوعة ...
و انتظار.

There is nothing but the night and the eyes
the far scattered lights
the light clashes
a whispering sound
lonely stray dogs
Oh, the sound of feet under the windows

Good night friends...

Good night

A moist morning as usual,

Open shoes,

And a waiting. (*A Crumb of Bread Is Enough* 22)

Ḥadād's poetry, even 25 years after it was written, is powerfully present in Syrians' lives. It is able to touch upon their lived realities, as if there are meeting points between the gloomy Syrian scene of the last five years and the one that dominates her writing.

Confronting Death, Loss, and Grief in Sanieh Şālḥ's Poetry

While place, silence, and death are important elements of Ḥadād's poetry, another Syrian woman writer and contemporary of Ḥadād, Sanieh Şālḥ, grapples with similar concepts in her works. Şālḥ's poetry is characterized by human perseverance and is rich with themes of death, loneliness, and fragility. According to Şālḥ's sister, the critic Khalida Said, even love for Şālḥ is without roses or kisses. Like Ḥadād, her language is simple and freed from the heavy reference of myths; it is a flow of human emotions and tenderness. This affective communication stands at the core of her work and is enhanced by simple constructions of sentences and phrases. Like other acclaimed Modernist Syrian poets, Şālḥ's works stem from everyday life, without the decorative and ornamental language inherent in Arabic poetry of the past.

Şālḥ surpassed the ideological narratives that were dominant in the 1960s in Syrian literature. She is not classified as a poet with an ideological vision. Instead, in her poetry, she documents the collapse of the world, the ruin of civilizations, and the loss of life and loved ones. The vision of death is present in most of her poems, and Şālḥ's take

on death often ventures into dreamscapes filled with violence and ruin. Such passages confirm the affective core of her poems and reinforce the pain and loneliness of death and loss. In “The Cutting Death,” she expresses her dilemma as an immortal victim. “Death” is waiting for her with his “sword”; she asks him to follow her because she is the “victim that follows [his] traces” (88). Death is her companion in the “long nights.” (88) Though “madness and waiting” are what she finds on her bed, it is death that befriended her and kept her calm.

Like Ḥadād, Ṣālḥ does not see hope around her, and we find, too, in both recurring pain, suffering, and loss. For Ṣālḥ and Ḥadād, poetry is the means to describe their melancholy, and it encompasses beauty and emancipation in the midst of all that is dark and frightening. Rather than seeing people as masses, Ṣālḥ delves into the human psyche, with its pains, losses, and isolation, in her poem “The Princess Tears” :

قد تكون ثيابي مزيفة،
و لآلئي مزيفة،
قد يكون كل ما في العالم
مخادعاً و مزيفاً
إلا دموعي،
أنا المرأة ذات الأعوام المسننة
أنزف كجندي بتر رأسه
و أنا أذهب و أجيء وراء النوافذ العالية
كأميرة تستعد للهرب
بعد أن أفسد الذعر فرحي و طفولتي

My clothes might be fake,
My pearls might be fake, too,
The whole world might be
Fake and deceiving
Except my tears,
I am the woman with the pointed years
I bleed like a soldier whose head
Was cut.
I come and go behind the high windows,
As a princess who is ready to escape,
After fear spoiled my happiness and joy. (*Complete Works* 121)

Şālḥ's pain is genuine and fertile, and it breaks her free from her silence. There is a cosmic space that grows inside of her—sadness: “It is a beautiful and an effective thing. It raises to the rank of poetry. I still grow poetically in my sadness” (*Complete Works* 5).

Writing is the path of salvation for Şālḥ, the path through which human emancipation passes. She faces her brutal disease with poetry. Death happens inside life itself: It is the final rest for the material condition of life, and it happens inside the objective world, not inside the self. There is a personal continuity that is not threatened by death. Due to her disease, Şālḥ confronts death and place, and she tries to prosecute injustice in the world to find answers with which she could cope and continue. Her writing is a stance against death and disease. She possesses a feeling of continuity that does not restrain her to linear time. With poetry, she bridges distances that are unbridgeable in reality. She seeks salvation in her poetry.

Indeed, poetry, for Şālḥ, is the only place that is untouchable by death. Her body is the poem she writes, and the reader could visualize her with her expressions and phrases:

ألفُ حصانٍ يصهلُ في دمي

أُنزِعُ بموتي

أرضعُ جوعَ الذئاب

أمتطي شعَرَ الريح

ألبسَ الليل

One thousand horses

neigh in my blood.

My death is my armor,

I drink from wolves' hunger

And ride the wind's hair

I wear the night. (*Complete Works* 54)

Şālḥ finds peace not in the lived-in places and spaces but in her resistance to death with her creativity and poetry, which is her only and better means to confront evanescence or tame it.

Dreams, Myths, and an Ideal Future

Şālḥ's poems often intertwine dream worlds with reality and the mythical with the ideal. In her poem "The Last Memory," Şālḥ writes, "The waist of the volcano is without... / history papers that distribute its arsenic here and there / while the last

memory is waiting at the shore." Addressing her daughter in the same long poem, she says:

ألغيتُ جسدي و دخلتُ في نفق حلمك
و لم أقو على الاقتراب
أعلنت العصيان على الموت و على الحياة
أخذت أركض في الظلام دون أن أدرك المخرج المائي
و لم أقو على الاقتراب

I abolished my body and entered the tunnel of your dream....

I announced disobedience to death and life

I kept running in the darkness

without being able to reach the water. (*Complete Works* 250)

Şālḥ abandons her body for the sake of the dream's world; she announces her rebellion against "death and life" together. And restless, as in a nightmare, she keeps "running in the darkness / without being able to reach the water's exit" (250).

Şālḥ often invites us into her own and others' dreams, which are, in turn, horrifying and hopeful. The poem "Silent Ideas" starts with images of black roses in exile, where she is in search of freedom. She wants to either "drink from one mouth / or to be repressed together" (251). She knows that someone will shoot her memory. She addresses an authoritative figure in her poem, calling him "the master," and she goes to him to "complain about a fertile dream / and the male rose who humiliated his female" (252). Even God is unavailable here, as he denied her and "shut the door"; the heart of

the sky has an echo that humiliates, “a tail grew between my fronts, while I am descending towards the lower world” (252).

Many of Ṣālḥ’s poems center on ruin, death, and loss—and the emotions that accompany such moments—and her poetry uses dreams, myths, and ideal visions to confront the past, understand the present, and envision a better future. The lived present she writes from is a rejected place—and a terrifying one. Yet, the past for her is not a place of glory or inspiration either. While the mythical is sometimes presented along with the historical moments it matches, at other times, it appears in her depictions to critique or alter reality. Ṣālḥ writes about Syrian history, yet it is a wounded and disastrous history that is filled with losses and ruins, a history that is hanged “with the horizon robes” (151). Ṣālḥ uses the mythical to draw attention to the history of loss, writing about Doshara—the God of Sun for Nabataeans:

ها هي دوشارا تأتي لتطعم الأرواح الساقطة،
هم يجهلون،
ولكن أنتِ و الوطن تعلمان أن الهموم
والانكسارات

Here comes Doshara
To feed the falling spirits.
They do not know,
But you and the homeland
Know
That worries and defeats

Placed her last nails

In the soul. (151)

Indeed, as the present frightens her and the past is filled with losses, only the future is ideal for her, and she mentions the tools that might make it a better place for others and the coming generation—including for her daughters. Through this conflict between past, present, and future, time becomes a painful and gloomy reminder of loss. She interprets time and the differences between linear time and that of the inner world:

أيها الزمن الذي يغني بحناجره جميعاً
أغاني الفراق،
في رأسي غربة ثقيلة،
وأنتما في العظم و القلب و المفاصل.
الزمن يتفرق ويحتشد،
يمد حبالاً شدت إليها أعناق.

Oh time!

You who chant with all your throats,
the departure songs.

In my head, there is
a heavy exile.

Time separates and gathers.

It stretches robes
with necks attached
to it. (296)

Her collection *Poems* further reflects this tension between the past, present, and future and their connections with the ideal and real. The book is formed with five parts: “Sham,” “Release the Night,” “Hallucination,” “A Future of Sand,” and “Lovers from Sand.” These titles indicate the connection between the realistic, the mythical, and the idealistic in her writing. The first part, titled “Sham,” means “Syria” or “Damascus” in the Syrian context; it is also the name of one of Şālḥ’s daughters. In the second poem, “Release the Night,” she writes:

ها هو حصانك الثلجي يطير مجنوناً بنار
المستقبل
تلمع عيناه ببريق الدهشة،
شيء ما يغريه في الماضي،
شيء ما يمنعه ويشد لجامه.

flying crazy with the future fire
something tempts him in going on
something preventing him
something pulling his harness.

If the future was foreseen, Şālḥ writes that she would have chosen the longest life for her daughter, yet she believes that her wretchedness will be inherited by her daughter’s generation. She warns her from all the expected misery and advises her to fly away, to liberate herself from all that could cuff her path and soul (136).

In her poem “You Leave from the Body Walls,” Şālḥ addresses her two daughters again:

ها هو العالم يدور
يسحب قسراً من أعمارنا
ليمنح بالمجان للصّوص والسفّاحين،
اضرمني يا ابنتي، جدّيني،
لقد تعفّنت في النسيان
يردمون فمي، ولكنه عميق لا قرار له
أفسدوا ذاكرتي بالفجوات،
بهندسة الجوع
بتقلّبات الجسد.
تريّني،
أطيلي بقاءك في جوف الزمن
وفجّري ما ينذر انفجاره.

The world is going around
it is being taken compulsorily from our lives
to be given freely to thieves and butchers
My daughter, set me on fire, renew me
I have been rotten in forgetfulness....
They spoiled my memory with holes, with the geometry of hunger
and the body's fluctuation.
Stay here
stay longer in the heart of time
and explode what is rarely exploded.

The Earth in this poem ascends with Şālḥ and her daughters, in order “not to walk in the air of presumptions” (34). This Earth flies, too, towards a “dream,” with Şālḥ 's first daughter Sham standing in the front and her second daughter Sulaf shaking “the tree of clouds” till “all tears fall”—tears that are forgotten by “history” and “denied by ages.” There is a historical and a political connotation in this poem, as Şālḥ writes, “I was lonely, then I was divided / I kept being divided / till I created a nation whose legend is you” (35). This can be a reference to Syria, which was a part of the Large Syria and included Lebanon and Jordan till it was divided by French and British mandate in 1924, according to Sykes Picot agreement in 1916. The division was not a political and a geographical one only; it was a division that weakened the nation and its resources—a situation that only worsened with the ruling of dictator regimes in the nation. Perhaps Şālḥ has a message in this poem to her daughters and to future generations: She sees in them the dream of a better tomorrow that she and her generation has not lived.

Şālḥ ends her poem by asking her daughters not to fall into despair and to follow her into the "heart of the bushes" that are "the bushes of Rimbaud and Lautréamont, where there are wonderful things" that are made for Şālḥ's daughters and other dreamers by the side of "the dream tree" (36). In this, poetry becomes a shelter from unbearable reality and its brutal tragedies. With poets like Rimbaud, Lautréamont, and Şālḥ, the young generation can find respite. There is hope for Şālḥ, when people keep dreaming and seek the path of knowledge and freedom.

In an interview with Şālḥ with the Lebanese newspaper *Annahar*, conducted upon her receipt of a prize for the best modern poem, Şālḥ says, "I am incapable of changing the world or of beautifying it, destroying or building it, as some poets say. I feel as

someone who talks in a dream.” In the face of death and loss and in the absence of a hopeful and a safe home, writing via such visions and dreams becomes a place of salvation for Şālḥ--a path by which she can confront the manifestations of a savage reality.

Place and Space: Home and Exile in Sanieh Şālḥ’s Poems

While death and dreams play important roles in Şālḥ’s poetry, like Ḥadād, place, in particular, is central to all of Sanieh Şālḥ’s work. Explorations of place and space pervade her work, from the physical representations of city buildings and natural landscapes to examinations of home and homeland. Yet, the world around her is not worthy of trust, and she looks at it with suspicion and profound questioning. In her book *The Male Rose*, Şālḥ writes of a range of places—as well as “[her] homeland”—in the poem “The Last Memory”:

لست أقصد وحش العفن
ولا عواطف السماء المتقلبة الخؤون
لا المشافي المكتظة بالتوابيت ونجاسة المرضى
لا عبور المحيط بعد أن تشقَّه عصاي
لا الوطن الذي يتقبه قبري في الوسط كالهواية
أو الغابات العظيمة التي غرقت في باطن البحار،
لا الشفق أو الغسق
لا البراري ولا محطات الانتظار
أو ذلك الخيط الأسود الذي يقال له غربتي ووطني.

I do not seek the beast of rotteness
neither the emotions of the moody betraying sky
or the hospitals crowded with coffins and patients' dirtiness....
not the homeland which my grave punches in the middle like the pit....
not the deserts or the waiting stations
or that black thread which they call my exile and my homeland (228).

Home for Şālḥ is not a space longed for; rather, it is resented and abhorred, and a sense of helplessness about home, distance, and exile pervades much of her writing. The Syrian poet Akram Katreb notes that while Şālḥ resides in exile, she rarely celebrates place. She does not adopt a feminist perspective, yet she goes further in discovering home and her relationship with her daughters and her husband, who she used to share her dreams with. Thus, her private, inner explorations coalesce with the public geographies of her poetry. She addresses her daughter in the same long poem, telling her:

و لا أقوى على الاقتراب
فمن أين تجيء المسافات
و أنت في قلبي،
يسارك يساري و يمينك يميني؟

I am unable of getting closer
where do distances come from?
while you are in my heart!
your left is my left
and your right is my right. (249-250)

Her directions meet her daughter's, and they both follow the same compass's path, despite the distances that may exist between them.

Şālḥ's poems oscillate between the public scene and her personal struggles, yet all of her work traverses geographies—both physical and psychological. While she hopes for a better future, her writing about the loss of her homeland and the loss of life creates a rhetoric of giving up within her poetic architecture and suggests that one must become content with ruins. As she writes in her poem “The Lake”:

أيها الطائر المحلق عبر الأفاق
تذكر أنّ الرصاص في كل مكان، تذكرني
أنا المسافرة الأبدية
طول حياتي أغدّ السير
وما تجاوزت حدود قبوري.

Flying bird across the horizons
remember that bullets are everywhere
remember me
I'm the eternal traveler
all my life
I seek moving
but I never crossed my grave's borders. (96)

Like the distinctions between the ideal and the real, death and life, the past and the future, Şālḥ emphasizes a number of dualities in her poems and uses geographic spaces to explore their boundaries. In this, water is frequently used as a boundary space

in her writing and takes on a number of roles. It stands for the imagination, but it is also “punished” and “absented” in the “maps of cancer.” (Cancer here might be an indication of the disease which she was suffering from during writing her last collection.) She talks to water and praises her, because despite of all the torture it is exposed to, water

sends her sad songs
along the thirsty nights
along the nights of the body
along the nights of the crime.

This water is mighty and capable of surviving, like Şālḥ herself. The appearance of water in Şālḥ’s poems is also a reiteration of Syria imagined as free, mobile, and rebellious. As she writes,

The soul places her eggs in the body
so blond and blue-eyed babies are born
to play with the sea
and build for it castles from sand
seducing it to enter
but it is too smart
to be deceived (31).

In this instance, the sea is a place for Şālḥ that does not tolerate deception from people of the Earth as it is “too smart” to “be deceived” by “blond and blue-eyed babies” (31).

What makes Şālḥ and Hadād important in the Syrian poetry scene is the simplicity of their language—a language laden with feelings of nothingness, fear, and helplessness. The fragility of both Şālḥ and Hadād’s writing is the core of their powerful poetry. At the

same time, the melancholic, depressive, and mysterious voice they write with might have discouraged critics from dealing with their poetry. Syrian poetry before them was mostly masculine, wild, realistic, and rather attacking the defeats. Şālḥ and Hadād, however, took a different direction, a deeper one that deconstructs the psychological realms of people, especially the weak and the defeated ones. They were not only different from their contemporary poets, but they also competed with them at a time of a patriarchal domination in the writing and publishing scene.

Chapter Three

The Poet Who Passes Death with Everyday Language and Love

Syrian poet Ryāḍ Ṣālḥ al- Ḥsīn (1954-1982) is situated amid a number of Syria's pioneering, modern poets due to his innovative writing style, which is characterized by its spontaneity and accessibility with poems using simple language and focusing on the day-to-day lives of ordinary people. Ḥsīn was among the first of his kind in modern Syrian poetry, and his poetry has been described as both sentimental and powerful (Ajeeb 13). Syrian poet Ḥsīn Ajeeb characterizes Ḥsīn's poetry as experimental, venturing into new literary terrain (13). Eventually, because of the admiration that writers and readers alike had for his poetry, his complete works⁸ became accessible for free on a Syrian website in 2007 and on the personal website of the Lebanese poet Sūzān 'lywān. Though his life was short, his writing was one of the connectors between 1950s Modernism and the later Modernist movement that started in the late 1970s, and Ḥsīn wrote and published alongside other poets like 'ān mḥmūd, Monzer Mṣrī, and Bandr 'bd al-ḥmīd. In this chapter, I argue that Ḥsīn's poetry is essential to the movement of Modern Syrian poetry and the emergence of the "daily poem." He wrote in a perceptive literary style that described reality by using everyday language and cataloguing daily experiences. Ḥsīn's language is transparent and close to people; it does not need a literary interpreter for them

⁸ Since Ḥsīn's poetry has not been translated into other languages, and all the translated poems here are my primary translation from Arabic.

to understand him. Yet, his poetry also experiments with the possibilities of what reality could be: While he closely observes lived existence, he often takes his poetry one step further by constructing and extrapolating his own images of possible places and spaces, generating new visions of what his society and culture could be.

This chapter analyzes what results from Ḥsīn's attending to the character of place. Ḥsīn does not write in isolation from the world around him; instead, he pays attention to the places and the circumstances they face. In *Senses of Place* (1997), Keith Basso and Steven Feld assert that ethnographies about place explore "the intricate strengths and fragilities that connect places to social imagination and practice, to memory and desire, to dwelling and movement" (Basso and Feld 8). In a similar way, place is not solely a physical element to Ḥsīn. It is imagined, narrated, rejected, celebrated, and reconstructed. He gives places meaning or reestablishes his relationship with them. In this chapter, I consider a number of questions about the link between place and identity in Ḥsīn's poetry: How do place and identity function in Ḥsīn's work? How are places reshaped and reconstructed through poetic language? How can a poet's identity be shaped by imagined places rather than actual ones? The following analysis of Ḥsīn's work will contextualize his poetry among the Modernist poets and techniques of the 1970s and 1980s in Syria and will map out his expansive efforts in modern Syrian poetry in relation to narratives of place and identity.

Ryād Ṣālḥ al-Ḥsīn: An Everyday Poet

Ḥsīn was born in 1954 in Dr'ā City, but his family is originally from Mār' village in north Aleppo. Because he was born deaf and mute, he was prevented from pursuing his education; instead, he educated himself on his own. Early in his life, he worked as a

journalist and a government employee, though he also experienced unemployment during his career. Throughout his life, he wrote poetry, short stories, children's stories, and journalistic and critical essays and articles, the first of which was published in 1976 (Ḥsīn 1). In the mid-1970s, Ḥsīn moved to Damascus in search of what he called an "abnormal life," yet his life there was extremely difficult. It was hard for him to forge his own path in Damascus, yet he was able to write and publish widely in publications such as *Al Masyra*, *Daily Culture*, and *Al Thawra*. Despite the trying circumstances and the absence of support of people with disabilities in Syria, Ḥsīn's disability did not stop him from continuing his education and pursuing a writing career; indeed, he published three poetry collections during his brief lifetime, with a fourth published after his death (Ḥsīn 93). Despite these successes, his social conditions were unstable and his poor health stressed his body and soul (3). He passed away at al-Mwāsāa hospital in Damascus on November 21, 1982, and he was buried in his hometown village Mār' in north Aleppo. Ḥsīn's early departure could have been the motive for his friends' initiative to write about him more than they wrote about other poets. His extraordinary health circumstances could not be ignored, especially since they led to his death. Regardless, his writing marked the modern Syrian poetry scene and affected both his generation and generations to come.

Ḥsīn's work is distinguished by the simplicity of his language. His expressions are based on a life that is affected by motion and conflict, and he deals with the details of daily life. His poems are marked by "spontaneity," as the critic Hael al-taleb notes, and it is the poetry that belongs to daily life, including "its details, intimacies," without relying on rhetorical density or particularly outdated diction ("The Current Moment Is a Poem"). Ḥsīn's poems use the language of his time, making his work accessible to many readers;

yet, while his language and subject choice are marked by the simple and quotidian, his poetry features a depth that speaks to the complications of human experience. This is why readers feel that his language resembles them and that his work expresses what they feel. Yet, despite his focus on everyday dimensions, Ḥsīn writes about a life that is different from his lived experience—an ideal life in which love, freedom, and justice exist. In his poem “Street” from his book *A Deer in the Woods* (1982), Ḥsīn describes the utopian city that he always dreamed of:

هذه مدينة مليئة بالشوارع
شوارع مفتوحة
تؤدي إلى جميع الجهات
لكن، اسمعني، أرجوك
حياتنا مغلقة
و الشارع الوحيد العادل
ذلك الذي يأخذني إلى قلبك.

This city is full of streets
open streets
that lead in all directions
listen to me please
our life is closed
and the only fair street
is the one that takes me to your heart (*Complete Works* 228).

In this poem, Ḥsīn compares a street that leads somewhere to an imaginative one that leads directly to the heart. *The Phenomenological Foundations of Geography* (1976) by

Edward Relph begins with a quote by the writer William James: “The world of concrete personal experiences to which the street belongs is multitudinous beyond imagination, tangled, muddy, painful and perplexed” (qtd. in Relph 3). Streets are the places that attract phenomenologists because as street signifies a place of living, dwelling and walking. A street, says Relph, “is little more than a blank space between two lines on a map” (3). While empiricists could lead us to lose details and lived experience, those working with phenomenology are conscious about these meanings of life. In this poem, Ḥsīn uses place to create a road that leads to an imagined, aspirational end—the heart.

In a poem called “The Lover,” he uses simple grammatical structures and diction to describe his surroundings with all its agony and tragedies. Much of this simplicity is found in the parallel grammatical structures Ḥsīn uses throughout the poem, including the repeated use of the imperative. As he writes,

أعطِ القناص رصاصاً
وانتظر بضع دقائق
فسيملاً الشوارع بالجثث
اعطِ النجار خشباً
وانتظر بضعة أيام
فسيملاً البئر بالنوافذ.....
أما العاشق...أما العاشق
فلا تعطه شيئاً
ففي قلبه ما يكفي الدنيا
من السيوف و النوافذ
من الأشجار و الجثث.

Give bullets to the sniper
and wait for a few minutes
he would fill the streets with corpses
give the carpenter wood
wait for a few days
he would fill the well with windows....
whereas the lover
the lover
don't give him anything
his heart contains what suffices in a world
of swords and windows
of trees and corpses (*Complete Works* 220-221).

Closed refers to a space. Ḥsīn suggests a relationship by inviting someone to listen to him. The contrast between the material dimension and the emotional one and between the “world” and the heart which he evokes as a space is dominant in this poem.

He presents his poems as narratives, and his technique is more dramatic than that of other poets of his time. His poems read as if they could be scenes in a novel or a play, and he uses short sentences to create a story that suggests many connotations and meanings without exaggeration, embellishment, or overly complicated words and images.

As he writes in “Two”:

كانا اثنين
يمشيان معاً

في الشوارع المهجورة
منه تفوح رائحة التبغ
ومنها تتساقط أوراق الليمون
وعند المنعطف
كنجمتين
سقطا

They were two
walking together
in the deserted streets
tobacco smell emanates from him
lemon leaves fall from it
and at the corner
as two stars
they fell (*Complete Works* 261).

He follows this with a second scene, in which he writes,

كانا اثنتين
أحدهما يغني
والآخر يحبّ الإصغاء
فجأةً توقّف عن هذا
وتوقّفت عن ذاك
عندما انكسر المزمار

They were two
one was singing
the other loved to listen
he suddenly stopped doing so
and she stopped that
when the flute broke (*Complete Works* 261).

The poem continues into a third scene:

كانا اثنين
أهدته قلماً للكتابة
وأهداها حذاءً خفيفاً للنزهات
بالقلم كتب لها: "وداعاً"
وبالحذاء الخفيف جاءت لتودعه.

They were two
she gifted him a pen for writing
and he gifted her light shoes for walking
with the pen
he wrote her
farewell
and with the light shoes
she came to bid him farewell (*Complete Works* 261).

As this series of poems shows, Ḥsīn's narration is sparse and focuses on describing events, places, items, and minute moments and images. This enables the reader to enter

the text and mingle with Ḥsīn's characters. Indeed, Ḥsīn does not pay much attention to defining the details of place and time and instead leaves them open. Though he describes many places in his poetry, he does not indicate that they are in a particular city or country. He obscures the specificity of places and times, focusing instead on emotions as the bonding power of his poems. He evokes places that are defined by the emotional bonds that unfold or exist in them. Relations are extremely central in these verses. They indicate the relations between the emotional and the material dimensions.

Another example of his abstraction of place and his focus on emotional connection can be found in his poem "A Small and Narrow Room" in which he writes:

غرفة صغيرة صالحة للحياة
غرفة صغيرة وضيقة صالحة للموت
غرفة صغيرة ورطبة لا تصلح لشيء
غرفة صغيرة فيها:
امرأة تقشّر البطاطا واليأس
عامل باطون لا ينام أبداً
بنت تبكي كثيراً بدون سبب
وأنا ولد مشاكس وغير لئيم
لديّ كتب وأصدقاء
ولا شيء غير ذلك.
ومنذ أن ولدت بلا وطن
ومنذ أن أصبح الوطن قبراً
ومنذ أن أصبح القبر كتاباً
ومنذ أن أصبح الكتاب معتقلاً

ومنذ أن أصبح الحلم وطناً
بحثتُ عن غرفةٍ صغيرةٍ وضيقةٍ
أستطيع فيها التنفّس بحرية.

A small and an inhabitable room,
A small, narrow room,
And feasible for death.
A small room where:
A woman is peeling potatoes and despair
A construction builder who never sleeps
A girl that cries a lot for no reason.
I am a troublemaking boy,
But I am not a mean one.
I have books and friends
But nothing else.
Since I was born
Without a home,
and since homeland became a grave
and detention a dream
and since the dream became a homeland,
I was looking for a small and narrow room,
where I could breathe freely. (*Complete Works* 161)

While Ḥsīn’s writing is simple and uses everyday language, his abstraction of place and space as well as his focus on emotion reveal his alignment with surrealism, too (161). Ḥsīn’s poetry questions human existence, including why people suffer and experience pain. With surrealism, a poem can allow the poet to realize his or her dream and find satisfaction for the self who seeks to act and live freely. Surrealism can celebrate peace and good and exclude whoever it wants from its space. Ḥsīn moves between images and poetry phrases seemingly disconnected in his poem “Fabric, Medals and Lighters for Happy Men”:

لا ماء في البحر
لا حياة في القبلة
لا عدالة بين نابي أفعى
ولا شمس ساطعة في قلبي
قطيع من الموتى في فمي
والغسيل على الشرفات.

There is no winter in the sea
and no life in the kiss,
no justice between the fangs of a snake
and no rising sun in my heart.

There is a herd of dead in my mouth,

While laundry is in the balconies. (*Complete Works* 27)

While there is no cognitive connection between these distinct and disparate images, in the vein of surrealism, they are connected via the poet’s feelings and vision.

The spirit of rebellion, protest, and revolution also appear in his poetry. Like most of the writers in Syria in the 1970s, he wrote about justice and confronting injustice and colonialism, and such poems about Syria still serve as a link between him and the current generation. His poem "Syria" has circulated significantly since the Syrian revolution began in March 2011. Ḥsīn writes:

يا سورية الجميلة السعيدة
كمدفأةٍ في كانون
يا سورية التعيسة
كعظمةٍ بين أسنان كلب
يا سورية القاسية
كمشرطٍ في يد جراح
نحن أبناءُك الطيبون
الذين أكلنا خبزك وزيتونك وسياطك
أبدأً سنقودك إلى الينابيع
أبدأً سنجفف دمك بأصابعنا الخضراء
ودموعك بشفاهاها اليابسة
أبدأً سنشقُّ أمامك الدروب
ولن نتركك تضيعين يا سورية
كأغنيةٍ في صحراء.

O beautiful happy Syria,
as a heater in December,
O poor Syria, as a bone between the teeth of a dog,
O cruel Syria

As a scalpel in the hands of a surgeon
We are your good children
who ate your bread, your olives, and your whips
We will always drive you to the springs
We will never dry your blood with our green fingers
And your tears with our dry lips
We will always cross the roads for you
And we will not let you get lost, Syria
As a song in the desert. (*Complete Works* 140)

The term “topophilia” is used by Yi-Fu Tuan to refer to emotional ties of a place or positive and affective ones. It indicates feelings of being home in certain places, for Tuan, it includes being aware of positive feelings about a place. This is what happens in this poem. Syria is the emotional place for Ḥsīn, though it is also tragic. For example, Ḥsīn and some of his writer and artist friends used to publish a literary journal in the mid-1970s in Syria. Because of this, he was arrested with some of them by the state security forces. These contradictory emotions about Syria—this “topophilia”—is clear in this and many of Ḥsīn’s other works.

Place and Displacement: Geographies of Memory and Meaning-Making

The human experience of place has been the center of numerous humanist studies of geography, as seen in works by Ted Relph Yi-Fu Tuan and David Seamon, Place for Relph is established on a reciprocal relationship between the specific and the general and between the lived place and the cognitive one. According to Relph, places are “the centers of our immediate experience of the world” (Relph 141), and they are

simultaneously external and internal. Additionally, Relph suggests that place happens when the webs of “significance woven by human beings” make people connected to their surroundings and when the Earth is touched by those webs (24).

In *The Poetics of Space* (1964), Gaston Bachelard asserts that “the poetic act itself, the sudden image, the flare-up of being in the imagination, is inaccessible... [and] in order to clarify the problem of the poetic image philosophically, we shall have to have recourse to a phenomenology of the imagination” (Bachelard xviii). Topophilia, the love of a place and investigating it are vitally important for Bachelard in studying self and memory. The places we live in bestow meaning to the mind. Places for Bachelard affect memories of people, as well as their thinking and feelings. This is why the outer and the inner spaces are interconnected and inseparable.

For the geographer Yi-Fu Tuan, “place incarnates the experience and aspirations of a people,” and it is not “only a fact to be explained in the broader frame of space, but it is also a reality to be clarified and understood from the perspective of the people who have given it meaning” (388). In his work, place is an ontological construction that brings the human experience together. Places are intimately connected with people’s experiences, a phenomenon that Ḥsīn explores in his poetic representations and examinations of place and space.

The places of Ḥsīn’s poetry are marked by war and conflict, with lovers fleeing homelands, death seeping into homes, and blood marking the sidewalks. In the first poem in his book *Daily Myths* (1980), Ḥsīn writes about a lover aching for his people and going between “the rattle of displaced people and the rattle of words,” a lover who is like those

"bloody fields and the golden corpses" (81). He departs time in order to sing and to enter a homeland

بيتاع أرغفة ومعاول
بيتاع أرصفة ومعامل
بيتاع حزناً شديداً
ودبابة سقطت بين فكي زهرة دفلى
بيتاع قبراً وسيماً لطائرة
وغصوناً خضراء من فرح أبدي للعاشقات.

selling bread and hoes
selling streets and factories
selling deep sadness and a tank that
fell between the jaws of oleander
selling a beautiful grave to a plane
and green leaves of eternal happiness
to women in love. (81)

The place he describes is an agitated one, a country on the edge of wars and massacres.

He and the people he describes in the poem do not seem to be prepared for this.

عاشق قال:
هذه هي الحرب
تخلع قمصانها الخشبية
تكشف عن عريها الحشري:
دماء وأرصفة

ودفاتر مبتلة بالنشيج

دماء وأرغفة

وأساور ضيقة

ومآذن واسعة

وطيور تهاجر

مجزرة وشعوب

مجزرة وزهور.

A lover says: this is the war
taking off its wooden shirts....
revealing blood and sidewalks
and notes full of whimper
blood and a lover
and notebook filled with blood and bread
tight bracelets
and wide minarets
immigrating birds
massacres and people
massacres and roses (81-82).

This is a war that opens and reveals everything—lovers' windows, grave windows, murderers, blood, and death. In this poem, poetry foretells the destruction and chaos of the country; it is this brutal and deadly place from which poetry emerges to describe such destruction and to take people elsewhere, to a safe and a hopeful place.

Ḥsīn is obsessed with questions about wars and eager to confront them. In his poetry, he is continually searching for answers that will enable him to create alternative places or to escape imaginatively from those places that are plagued by war and the agonizing realities of violence and death. In a poem titled “War, War, War,” he writes:

في الحروب التي ذهبت
في الحروب التي بقيت
في الحروب التي حاولت أن تجيء
كان وجه أليف لعاشقة يتمرغ في الرمل
والألم الطريقي
كانت العاشقات الوسيمات يخرجن للشرفات
ويعرضن أجسادهن المدماة لله
والله كان يجيء القرى وبصحبتة الجند
كان يعبىء منزره الملكي حروباً وينثرها في البيادر
كانت بيادر من فضة ومواعيد
ثم كانت حروب
وهل تذهبين إلى البيت
أم تذهبين إلى الموت؟

In the wars that left,
In the wars that stayed,
In the wars that tried to come.
there was a lover's face soaking in
sand and hierarchical pain.

God used to come here too
Accompanied by soldiers
Spreading wars on the field.
Those fields were of silver and dates,
Then there were wars.
Are you going home?
Or are you going to death? (*Complete Works* 82)

Ḥsīn continues, “we walked and walked / while bullets penetrated us.” He was walking hand in hand with her “hand in hand we dance / hand in hand we die” (82, 83). Ḥsīn asks death not to come, but death is coming through war that enters from every place around him—from windows, doors, from bars, books, and newspapers. This war reproduces in the lovers’ corpses “then asks the fighter to rest / to feed us wretchedness and bullets” (82). While this is a long poem about war, which is often featured in Ḥsīn's poetry, in this poem, love eventually becomes the conqueror through its simplicity, poverty, and fragility. A female lover comes from the ground and stretches her hands to the water “washing the tongues of orators and censors / recording the assets of the poor / that were swallowed up by wars” (83). This lover remakes symbols of war and of the militia. Ḥsīn describes “bright blood / and broken skulls that spell the letters of the country / under the hat of the general” (83). He sees corrupted dreams and plans about wars against flowers, rivers, and the poor. He consumes his sadness and pain, like everyone else does in his poem—with a cup of tea, a cigarette, and lots of hoping. He throws his sadness “under the general's hat” (83). He is content with his homeland now and with his own oppression. He ends the poem with a scene of his beloved sitting by the seaside, taking

rest from despair and sorrow; she asks about a "delicious place without police / where we can exchange songs and kisses" (83). Ḥsīn answers "the sea"; she agrees and smiles.

Ḥsīn possesses a poetic consciousness that accepts all contradictions without elusiveness or philosophizing. He seems conscious of the tragic dualities and their arguments that lead to death. He prefers to befriend details in his poetry, in a celebration of a life lived moment by moment. In his poem "Cloth, Medals, and Lighters for Happy Men" from his first book *The Destruction of Blood Circulation* (1979), he writes:

لا تسألوا الزمن عن الذكريات
لا تسألوا الصعاليك عن رطوبة الأرصفة
لا تسألوا التوابيت عن رائحة الموتى
لا تسألوا القتلة عن رائحة الدم
ولا تسألوا سمر عن قلبي
فالأسئلة البسيطة قذيفة
الأسئلة المعقدة انتحار
ونحن سكان الأرض الأسوياء
من الأفضل أن نوزع الأقمطة والنياشين
على مغتصبي العالم.

Do not ask time about memories,

Do not ask the raiders about the moisture of the sidewalks,

Do not ask the coffins about the smell of the dead,

Do not ask murderers about the smell of blood,

Do not ask Samar about my heart.

Simple questions are a bomb,

Complicated questions are a suicide.
And we, the people of Earth, are equal,
And it is better for us to distribute cloth and medals
To the rapists of the world. (28-29)

This poem is full of rage and anger for people and their despair and helplessness. The described place possesses every element to make it rejected and hated by the poet and its inhabitants. It is not a place he identifies with, and he is not seen in this place. His beloved asks him “why can I not see you here? / Did they take your dark coat from you / to wipe with it the shoes of the kings?” (30). He mentions massacres that took place in Palestine and other countries and shows awareness of world issues, but at the same time, he is ridiculing his helplessness and seeks death in his questions:

زارني الموت ولم يكن على الرف قهوة
ولأن الموت يحب القهوة مثل جميع الناس
فلقد قلب شفتيه وصفق الباب وراءه
ومضى في قطار العتمة.

Death visited me
There was no coffee on the shelf
Death likes coffee
like all people do
so it flipped his lips
shut the door behind him
and took the train of darkness (31).

It seems that home is constructed in Ḥsīn's writing via imagination and rebelling against the place where one lives. He seeks salvation by moving either to death or to a better imagined place or by rebelling against everything. According to the scholar Tim Cresswell, moving is a "fundamental geographical fact of existence and, as such, provides a rich terrain from which narratives can be and have been constructed" (Cresswell 81). Space and time work together to produce meaning in Ḥsīn's poetry. His experience and what he goes through is what constructs his understanding about space and time.

Place and Identity

Place identity, according to Edward Relph, is the "persistent sameness and unity" that makes one place different from others (Relph 45). This perpetual identity is explained by Relph as having three elements: the physical setting of a place; the conditions, occasions, and actions of a place; and the group and individual connotations and sense of place that are established from the experiences and aims of people. Place identity for Ḥsīn, too, is defined as his sense of association with the places he writes about.

For Relph, place identity construes the ways in which places and identities are linked. We can assume this perception of place via means of ideas of attachment. Place attachment is described as a tie of affinity, significance, familiarity, or kinship (see Relph and Seamon). The term "place identity" is used here to refer to the personal place identity which, as Relph and other scholars use it, should crucially be distinguished from the city/place character.

Concepts of place identity appear primarily in environmental psychology, as the notion that identities are deeply rooted in their environments (see Duncan, Rybczynski, and Altman and Werner). Place identity is considered in history, sociology, and geography. Most of these works focused on how the place of dwelling place function as the sphere of belonging and sentiment in modern Western culture. For the environmental and social psychologists Harold Proshansky, Abbe Fabian, and Robert Kaminoff, place identity is derived from people's self-identity and is described as the feeling, awareness, and the character that is constructed by means of the psychological experience of spaces (57-83).

In Ḥsīn's poems, place identity emerges with its components of historical narratives and personal ones, along with community structures and a vision for the future. Thus, place identity cannot be separated from social class, social struggles, gender, and kinship—the factors named above as shaping place attachment. Place, thus, in Ḥsīn's poetry, is constantly shaped by human experience and knowledge. It is not a static reality nor a mere imagined one; instead, it is always evolving to re-establish reality and define it.

Ḥsīn examines himself in comparison to the world outside him, and language allows him to discover himself and to deconstruct the meaning of the world he lives in. Judith Butler's explication of the relationship between identity and language is relevant here:

I do not believe that poststructuralism entails the death of autobiographical writing, but it draws attention to the difficulty of the "I" to express itself through the language that is available to it. For this "I" that you read is in part a

consequence of the grammar that governs the availability of persons in language.

I am not outside the language that structures me, but neither am I determined by the language that makes this “I” possible. This is the bind of self-expression, as I understand it. (Butler xxiv)

Modern poetry functions from the relationship between language as a tool to express oneself and the self that creates and builds the language, even as the poem exists independently from the poet. Concepts of the space of the self or as a text are constructed through this context. Thus, identity expands beyond the self and is mapped onto places; simultaneously, words both construct and reflect the identities of self and place.

In Hs̄in's writing, as with the theoretical texts noted above, places like “home” are constituted via imagination, which resists the notion that home only exists as a physical, lived-in place; such imagined spaces also suggest ways of coping with trauma and loss by twisting reality, by imagining traumatic events in the future or the current time. This type of technique not only attempts to define place but also to give it alternative shape to it. Yet even then, sometimes the traumas of places and spaces cannot be escaped: In his poem “A Small and Narrow Room” in *Simple as Water, Clear as a Bullet* (1982), Hs̄in refers to the helplessness of the youth in his country and the impossibility of their departing from the tough living conditions. He writes about “Miss S,” the symbol of love in his life, about freedom, books, and friends; he talks about everything in his life as if he wants to have them all gathering in his narrow small room—and yet, Hs̄in reveals his hopelessness as that room is “not good for anything” (79).

Along with a range of feelings and imaginative alternatives, Hs̄in's spaces are populated with people who reflect the sentiments and philosophies he tries to convey.

The references to a beloved woman or lovers reinforces Ḥsīn's sense of protection, security, and belonging, whereas he detaches himself from the cultural and political connotations of places in many other poems. In his first book *The Destruction of Blood Circulation* (1979), in a poem titled "Lines from the Diary of the Evil Carpenters," Ḥsīn writes about cities filled with diseased people and others who are constantly on medication, where the dead are forgotten (33). He describes people who sing for love and freedom, whereas the carpenters go "to an evil direction or a bad bomb to write questions on trees trunks" (33). He gives this poem subtitles: "love," "the hands," "love, too," and "Miss S." In this poem, he uses simple language, yet this simplicity belies his inclusion of profound philosophies about death and life. He reminds his readers of painful reality with universally shared symbols and references. He says that love is

أن تحب امرأةً من صفصاف وأعشاب نارية
 أن تمتلئ يدك بالمسامير والبراكين الميتة
 أن تسوي من خصلات شعرك بيتاً صغيراً
 لعجوز وحيدة

to love a woman from willow and fire grass
 to have your hand full of nails and deadly volcanos
 to create a small house
 from your hair
 to an old lonely woman (33).

He emphasizes love many times in his poem, as if it is the only salvation from this deadly place. He ends one of the shorter sections within in this long poem with

أن تحب. أن تمتلئ. أن تسوي. أن تذكر
أن تشرب. أن تعبى. أن تضع. أن تضغط.
أن تموت. أن تنتظر. أن تحب. أن تحب-
يعني ببساطة بأنك تستطيع أن تكون
جديراً بقراءة هذه القصيدة.

To love, to be filled, to equate, to remember
To drink, to fill, to put, to press,
To die, to wait, to love, to be loved—
to simply be capable of being
to be worthy of reading this poem (35).

The images of death, cutting, chopping, traps and bullets are all replaced by images of love and inventing ways of loving. The places he primarily describes are those of a torn reality that does not allow its people to breathe peacefully. He invites a woman in his poem “The Hands” to live warmly and happily with him. The poem title reflects how he does not care about what is outside his inner world. He wants to give the woman he is speaking to a world outside the actual one. He says he wants her to forget the fish that escaped from the sea, which was taken as a mistress by a policeman who killed her. He admits that the whole joy in the world was stolen from him, his beloved, and from people. He says he wants to tear his body open in front of her so she can see in it the cells of his body and the dark holes that were placed by white and black weapons of those who possess the happiness. All that is left for people is “cheap tissues to wipe our sweat,” “The hands so we could keep producing race boats,” “the eyes to watch their stunning

lives” (36). He tells her that they are “colored, too,” but not like color TVs or those people who stole happiness from them. Throughout this poem, Ḥsīn uses linguistic plays on words and rich images to bring the concrete and abstract worlds together. This poem reflects Ḥsīn’s commitment to writing about the hopes of ordinary people.

In this and other poems, Ḥsīn writes about the fragility of people, including himself and his beloved. In “The Hands,” he and those he writes about do not belong to the world he describes; with his words, Ḥsīn offers an alternative reality, a place where snow falls from heaven, where he will always love grass and drink milk. Yet, he will also miss happiness and bread, because he is smashed by axes that are made for trimming trees. He cares about lighting the graves of people, about compassion, and not about the actual world, its pretense, or its consumerism. With all he suggests in this poem, Ḥsīn is able to “draw small lines” and to solve the equation of life.

Poetic Language and Identity

In his poem “The Destruction of Blood Circulation,” published in his 1979 book bearing the same name, Ḥsīn's body is the medium by which his beloved could move (*Complete Works* 41). If not, she could wait for him in the next station:

استقلي باص جسده
أو انتظريه في المحطة التالية
فهو الآن متهم لأنه قتل
ومتهم بتخريب الدورة الدموية:
القبلة الأولى رصاصه
الطلقة الأخيرة حب.

He is accused now
because he is dead
and accused of destroying the blood circulation: the first kiss is a bullet
the last bullet is love (41).

This long poem includes nine short ones within it. In the first, “An Autograph of R.S.H.,” there is a “slaughtered planet,” “a broken sky,” and a sea of neon that runs in his eyes (42). Nonetheless, in his eyes is also a beautiful barefooted woman who runs while he sings: “she was soft...soft / as snow and fountains” (43). Ḥsīn constructs a tragic place with these images, yet he does not allow the tragic place to take over his beloved’s autograph. Her image surpasses the pain of the place and its surrounding drought. Love is the identity place he offers to the melancholic places he describes. In the second poem “Dream,” he speaks about a woman in whose hands he can read “the terrains of the wind / the glories of the wild waves” (42). He crumbles in the climate of her kisses and turns to “green fish and passable woods / and kingdoms that open its gates to the knights of wonder” (42) and to the enchanted birds. Love for Ḥsīn has emancipating power that liberates him from the rigid language of ruins and blood that dominate his language and poems when he constructs places marked by war. It replaces the lived place and diminishes it by the power of love that colors his language and soothes his words. Ḥsīn does not accept the fixed locations he evokes. Instead, he moves between places and creates his new places, even when they are formed with dead people, who resemble the living with their worries, fears and dreams. This is similar to Massey’s analysis about place as “constructed out of the multiplicity of social relations across all spatial scales”

(65). His poem shifts as he wants it to do, and then readers shift it according to their understanding of it.

In the fifth poem, “Questions,” he asks questions to his country, which he does not name but which the reader knows is Syria:

أيتها البلاد المصفحة بالقمر والرغبة والأشجار،

أما أن لك أن تجيئي؟!!

أيتها البلاد المعبأة بالدمار والعملات الصعبة

الممتلئة بالجثث والشحاذين،

أما أن لك أن ترحلي؟!!

O my armored country with moon, desires and trees,

Is not it time for you to come?

O countries filled with destruction and hard currencies,

Corpses and beggars,

Is not it time for you to leave?! (43)

In this poem, Ḥsīn portrays his country as a place that carries contradictions of pain and joy, of destruction and beautiful nature, of love and hatred, of honesty and corruption, of death and life. He wants its bright condition to come to him, yet he asks it to leave him with its destructive shape that is full of brutal images and excruciating reality. The beautiful country he builds in his language is very dreamy, because it exists like this in his head: This is how he imagines it to be, how he wants it to be. The second agonizing

place is his country, too, but he wants it to vanish because he is after the life, the moon, and the desires he wants in the first one.

In the ninth poem “Possession,” he writes about his beloved again who is “bright as a laughter / full of Eids / delicious as bread” (45-46), whereas he only owns these words and some wretched memories engraved on his body. He chooses to end this poem with love, too, and makes his beloved the only place that could be his happy home.

Time and Place

In his book *The Destruction of Blood Circulation* (1979), he writes another poem titled “Marseillaise of the Neutron Age” (47-51). Ḥsīn writes about the age of plastic love and plastic hearts, where “trains take soldiers to death in holidays” and “clowns cry on themselves secretly” while they make people laugh. It is the age of “gas heaters and suffocating by gas.” With all of those abhorrent images, he finds a way to live by smelling the hands of his beloved and drinking her memories. That woman cannot believe those scary images he writes about, and she cannot be convinced that they live in the Neutron age. It is the age of

عصر القبلات السريعة في الشوارع
عصر الجواسيس الذين يقدمون لك القهوة
مع المورفين
عصر الطائرات التي تطعم البشر القنابل
والألعاب
عصر الأحذية المتقوية والكلابات
عصر التعب البطيء

fast kisses in the street
the age of spies who give you coffee with morphine
the age of aircrafts that feed people bombs and games....
the age of punched shoes clamps
the age of slow fatigue (48).

These images construct a place of war and destruction. He keeps on describing this neutron age, then he asks the wretched bourgeoisie to come and share with him and his friends in their crying and singing.

The time and the place evoked by Ḥṣīn in his depiction of the neutron age are not the time and place he aspires to or wants to live in. He resists them fiercely with his alternative times and places, with songs, with crying, and by deconstructing the horrid nature of those places. He is not in denial of their damaging effect on him and others; he is not tranquilized by the pain he is exposed to, yet neither is he seeking a way out by forgetfulness and neglect of his feelings and fears. On the contrary, he enumerates the tragedies around him, he gives them names and makes them heard and known by those who are afraid of knowing or who simply do not want to be aware, like his beloved. He ridicules the possibilities of death and oppression by writing about it in details. There are graves and beds around him; there is a match,

عود كيريت واحد يكفي:

لإضاءة شمعة

أم لتفجير مدينة؟

عود كيريت واحد يكفي:

لتحضير كأسين من الشاي

أم لتحضير محرقة للملحدين؟

عود كبريت واحد يكفي:

لتنظيف الأسنان

أم لإخفاء معالم جثة مغتصبة؟

one match is enough to

light a candle

or to bomb a city? one match is enough to prepare two cups of tea

or to prepare a crematory to burn atheists?

One match is enough to floss teeth

or to hide the features of a raped corpse? (48-49).

Those horrendous images prevail in his poem. He keeps on wondering what the world or people can do with only one match. He intellectually compares life and death, criminals and victims, the dead and the living. He is conscious that this place exists, for “here...here / the dead can suffer / even the dead could learn dancing” and “could be polluted” (49). He equates the living with the dead in their suffering and agony, as the living are extremely polluted with wars, famines and crisis. The living are “the seasonal dead” (49), whose graves are injected with smoke, whose hearts are stained with insomnia, and whose nights are filled with sighs. The living are “the seasonal workers” (49) who are always tired and have been tired since “the pyramids till the unique jewel of Bokassa” (49) (Bokassa refers to Jean-Bédél Bokassa (1921-1996), who was the dictator of the Central African Republic). Through these images, we can notice how Ḥsīn incorporate symbols from across the world and history in his writing, as if he is writing as a world citizen, for the world, and not merely as a locally-rooted Syrian citizen.

Hsīn's resistance to the actual place, Syria, is shown more in the later lines of the poem, when he says

نخرج إليكم... نخرج إليكم
لا من القبور ولا من المحيطات
لا من الكتب ولا من الجدران

we come out for you....

we come out for you

neither from graves

nor from oceans

neither from books/nor from walls (50).

They come out to resist with everything they have

بأيدينا القمصان الملطخة بالزيوت و الطين
انتظارنا العادل و دساتيركم البارعة
نخرج إليكم... نخرج إليكم
لسنا أشراراً ولا مهذبين
لا نحب العنف ولا نكره الطيور
وأجسادنا تفوح دائماً برائحة المعادن و اليانسون

with our shirts that are stained with oil and mud....

with our just waiting and your magnificent constitutions

we are neither evil nor polite

we don't love violence

we don't hate birds

and our bodies always smell like metal and anise. (50)

With that heavy and significant language that evokes absolutes, Ḥsīn makes the people come out to the oppressors, not only with their pain and hopes but also with

بشر فانتا و أيماننا التي تتساقط كالذباب

بزماننا المعطوب

بأجسادنا المعطوبة

بأحلامنا المعطوبة وفاكهتنا المعطوبة

نخرج إليكم... نخرج إليكم

نحن مواطنو العصر النيتروني

عصر الرؤوس المزروعة بالألغام

و بالقلوب الطافحة بالأغاني.

balconies and days that are falling like flies

with our broken time

with our broken bodies

with our broken dreams

broken fruits

we come out for you

we come out for you

we, the citizens of the neutron age

the age of mines-planted-heads

and hearts overwhelmed with songs (50-51).

Ḥsīn mixes the tangible with the intangible in the people's fight. He brings with them balconies and days that fall down together. The broken time goes in hand with the broken bodies and the broken dreams; nonetheless, the people come out against their oppressors to fight them with their sons and their whole selves. This poem considers place, time, and identity simultaneously, yet the conclusions it reaches and the path it takes are not fixed; instead, they are changing and enter different layers of time and space. Movement places identity in it, inside and outside places: death and life, we and them, here and there. Ḥsīn does not identify himself with specific and fixed geographical places, though he emphasizes the significance of place in different ways, especially in his diction. The poem becomes his place, if an imaginary one.

In the last part of the poem, the poet slowly redefines the neutron age as the age of tanks, criminals, "nuclear trees," "Nazi birds," and the age of appointments with funerals throughout the whole week (50). It is the age of sadness, pigs, madness, machine guns, and death. Nobody is excluded from the fear that accompanies all of these calamities. Yet, in the last three lines of the poem, he repeats this line twice: "in all the nights / in all the nights / you will have a date with my heart" (51). Despite all the surrounding destruction, he is not dead from the inside. He is able and will always be, as he admits here, to see his beloved and be there for her, even when everything around him, especially his country, has abandoned him.

Ḥsīn reestablishes again his relationship with the actual place he writes against/in, but this time he resists it clearly, naming the tools of death and torture and presenting his people's voice that comes out against oppressors with songs and for love; for our poet, this suffices in creating an alternative age that opposes and transcends the neutron age.

The characteristics of place appear in this poem, oscillating between the historical and the conservative meaning of place, or places as edifices of feelings. For Massey, this fluctuation indicates a dynamic understanding of places as “time-spaces” that have “global sense” (Massey 179-81). Massey’s relation to place is a “relational” one that includes inescapable dialogues by means of interconnectedness and notions of openness and disclosure (181). As Massey writes,

The “lived reality of our daily lives” is utterly dispersed, unlocalized, in its sources and in its repercussions.... [W]ords such as “real,” “everyday,” “lived,” “grounded” are constantly deployed and bound together; they intend to evoke security, and implicitly, they counterpose themselves to a wider “space” which must be abstract, ungrounded, universal, even threatening. If we really think of space relationally, then it is the sum of all our connections, and in that sense utterly grounded, and those connections may go around the world. (Massey 184-185)

In Ḥsīn’s book *Simple as Water, Clear as a Bullet* (1982), in a poem titled, “Tomorrow in the Morning,” he writes:

غداً في الصباح
سنتسلق الشجرة ونأكل التوت
غداً في الصباح
سأمسك يدك وأركض في البرية
غداً في الصباح
سأقتلك ألف قبلة
وأقول لك ألف صباح الخير

ولكن من يؤكد لي أن الصباح سيأتي؟

الليلة مديدة كالعصور

المرأة في الشرفة

و أنا في السجن.

Tomorrow in the morning

We will climb the tree

And eat berries

Tomorrow in the morning

I will hold your hand

And run in the valleys

Tomorrow in the morning

I will kiss you one thousand kisses

And tell you one thousand good mornings

But,

Who could confirm for me

That the morning is coming?

The night is eternal as ages,

The woman is on the balcony

And I am in the prison. (153)

The language of the poem contributes to its description about places dreamt of and moves far from it. This makes the poem open to multiple layers of meanings. The “valleys” suggest a space for performing the poem. The images of holding his beloved’s hands and

kissing her announce an expectation of happiness and peace. This place appears to be free from commodification. Yet, he surprises us in the second stanza when he describes the night as long, and the woman in a different place, on the balcony, while he is in prison and not with her, as he imagines and narrates in the first stanza. This poem creates a relationship between what theorist Henri Lefebvre refers to as “representations of space” and “space of representation” (39). It represents the place of the valley with his beloved. At the same time, the space is representational as it defines the locations of the poem. That space is “directly lived through its associated images and symbols,” and the space of “inhabitants” and “users” is a “dominated space that the imagination seeks to change and appropriate” (Lefebvre 39). The relationship between landscape and the poetic self is clearly depicted here. The poem is, thus, a depiction of the landscape, which also represents the landscape that the reader inhabits. The references to subjectivity in the poem are their own conceptual space.

Ḥsīn’s poetry is rooted in discourse about place, space, and human identity and presents many important narratives and discursive themes that make him stand out among his contemporaries and predecessors. Place, according to Yi-Fu Tuan, embodies people’s “experiences” and “aspirations” (388); therefore, it “is not only a fact to be explained in the broader frame of space, but it is also a reality to be clarified and understood from the perspective of the people who have given it meaning” (Tuan 388). In this sense, I have used the theory of place as an interpretive approach to Ḥsīn’s poetry as it allows me to answer questions about identity and place in his writing. Ḥsīn’s poetry renders the space and time of Syria visible; it examines it and offers narratives of suffering, war, and tragedies by incorporating stories and voices that could be real or imagined by him. His

depiction of stories creates an alternative reality to the actual place. Ḥsīn's poetry freely constructs times and spaces imagined or dreamt of by Syrian people, which is seen in the very last poem of his book *A Deer in the Woods* (1982):

لقد اعتدتُ
أن أعدّ القهوة كل صباحٍ لاثنتين
أن أضع وردةً حمراء في كأس ماء
أن أفتح النوافذ للريح و المطر و الشمس
لقد اعتدتُ
أن انتظرك أيتها الثورة.

I am used to,
I am used to preparing coffee
every morning, for two people
I am used to putting a red rose in
a glass of water.
I am used to opening the windows
for the wind, the rain, and the sun.
I am used to
waiting for you, revolution! (262)

Ḥsīn might be the first Syrian poet who replaced images of war and bloody with hope, love, and liberation—only through the power of his everyday language and his closeness to the dilemmas of the common people he wrote for and about.

Chapter Four

Conclusion

Literature and poetry can transcend local realities and experiences and indicate the presence of the global in the local. Poets who write about complex identities and feelings of alienation are not unique to Syria. However, this dissertation highlights the importance of place and displacement in modern Syrian poetry, the relationship of Syria to those who write about it, and Syrian poets' existence as social agents within their respective spaces and places. Poetry is not merely a combination of words, images, and similes; it has the capacity to encapsulate layers of meaning, the experiences of people in different cultures, and the mosaic of hopes and dreams of the people and experiences poets write about. Poetry requires a curious and engaged audience, and poems can create long-lasting, evocative memories in them. This is how the poetry of Da'd Ḥadād, Sanieh Ṣālḥ, and Ryād Ṣālḥ al- Ḥsīn paved the way for the generations of Syrian poets who followed them.

I chose to work on modern Syrian poetry not only because of my passion for poetry but also because as a Syrian Arab reader, I grew up surrounded by poetry that provokes, connotes many meanings, and involves people, locally if not globally. I was 16 years old the first time I read Ryād Ṣālḥ al- Ḥsīn's poems in a monthly Syrian literary journal whose theme that month was "Modern Syrian Poets," and his work had as much

of an impact on me then as it does now. While this project has meaning for me personally, it is also relevant on a political level; it is important that these writers are not just read in their own cultural contexts but are also brought to the attention of a larger global audience. I hope to see more scholarly work on modern Syrian poetry and literature, especially the writers and poets featured in this dissertation. Depending on how the findings in my individual chapters connect with future developments in Syria, I want to take a closer look at Syria today and show how my project is not only relevant within the narrow field of literary criticism or Arab literature but also to Syria's artistic and literary future. In this way, I hope this dissertation reaches beyond these disciplines and continues the conversation about how poetry reflects and connects with the human experience in both its bleeding moments and its noble pleasures.

One of the motivations for my study is to define place and identity in the poetry of Da'ūd Ḥadād, Sanieh Ṣālḥ, and Ryād Ṣālḥ al-Ḥsīn by examining the spatial terms developed in their use of poetic language. All the poems quoted and analyzed in this dissertation display those poets' awareness of spatial orientation and emphasis on place and space. The spatial perceptions in their poems postulate distinctive viewpoints on the ways in which they pictured place, space, and identity. In most of their poems, identity is established by the spatial relationships they construct in their writing and language. These poets portray a world splitting apart, yet as we see in their poetry, the self also dissolves and collapses. The grief and pain of this collapse is expressed in language that is closer to the language spoken daily than typical written language, drawing these images closer to the reader. Yet, while images of war, destruction, and loss are abundant in these works, in

some of them—and particularly in Ḥsīn’s dreamlike visions—these horrors are replaced by images that construct alternative realities that are both safe and liberating.

The poetry of Ḥsīn, Ḥadād, and Ṣālḥ paved the way for the generations of poets and writers in Syria that followed them. Their strength is based on their capacity to echo the agonies of people and their hidden, unarticulated fears. Their voices still echo in today's Syrian poetry. Ḥadād was very outspoken and blunt in her poems; she never hesitated to call things by their names in her poetry. Sanieh Ṣālḥ showed that silence can turn pain into a merciful companionship, whereas Ḥsīn was enthusiastic, cheerful, and very quick. Today's Syrian youth are inspired by those poets, who helped them find hope and the right words in the midst of the frustration, tragedy, and pain of present-day Syria. The voice of poetry rises above the rigid walls of time and returns to a Syria besieged with murder and terror, which has been inflicted by the current, brutal regime. Modern Syrian poetry, as represented by these poets’ works, acts as a witness to the historical moments in which they were written, and these poets prove that poetic imagination can capture the essence of a place and that it can create visions of what those places can be.

In this dissertation, the poems I deconstructed and analyzed in terms of their relation to place and space express free thinking and consciousness despite some of the poets' young ages, limited experience, and short lives. Nonetheless, they became pioneers of modern Syrian poetry and remain some of the most important poets to date. The themes of love, freedom, and human values about which they wrote were authentic and were central to their writing projects. In their writing, the personal becomes the universal and reflects details that are both human and global. Some of their poetry expressed an

aspiration for moral justice, as can be seen in one of Ḥsīn's most famous and well-loved poems, which is still recited by Syrians who believe in justice, freedom, and democracy:

يا سورية الجميلة السعيدة

كمدفأة في كانون

يا سورية التعيسة

كعظمة بين أسنان كلب

يا سورية القاسية

كمشط في يد جرّاح

نحن أبناءك الطيبون

الذين أكلنا خبزك وزيتونك و سياتك

أبدًا سنقودك إلى الينابيع

أبدًا سنجفّف دمك بأصابعنا الخضراء

ودموعك بشفاهانا اليايسة

أبدًا سنشقّ أمامك الدروب

ولن نتركك تضيعين يا سورية

كأغنية في صحراء

Syria....

we are your kind children,

who ate your bread, olives, and whips.

Forever, we will lead you to water springs,

Forever, we will wipe your blood

with our green fingers,

and your eyes with our dry lips,

Forever, we will pave the roads to you,

and we will never let you get lost, Syria,

like a song in the deserts. (*Simple as Water, Clear as a Bullet* 140)

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