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T. S. Eliot's Influence on Al-Sboul's Novella *You as of Today*

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Abstract

The purpose of this paper is to show how T. S. Eliot's poetry has in/directly influenced Jordanian writer Tayseer Al-Sboul's novella *You as of Today* (1968). First of all, Al-Sboul's protagonist, Arabi, is a *flâneur* who meanders through the streets of Arab cities and unveils ugly socio-cultural and political realities that echo Eliot's sordid images. Secondly, motifs like the cat and the corpse, appear in Al-Sboul's novella. Thirdly, just like Eliot's *The Waste Land*, *You as of Today* is fragmented in structure. Moreover, images of despondency in the final section of *The Waste Land* are almost repeated in Al-Sboul's novella to reflect the state of despair and loss that Arab people have experienced after the 1967 defeat in a way that echoes the state of desolation and helplessness that people in Europe experienced after WWI. Finally, Arabi describes the Arab nation as "punching bags stuffed with hay," a description reminiscent of Eliot's hollow men. By drawing on Eliot's poetry, which has influenced generations of Arab intellectuals since the translation of Eliot's works into Arabic in the 1930s, Al-Sboul shows how the 1967 defeat shattered young Arab people's hopes of progress and development and raised questions on contemporaneous Arab politics and ideological affiliations.

Keywords: T. S. Eliot, Influence, Tayseer Al-Sboul, *You as of Today*, Jordanian literature.

> "Beautiful, beautiful! But didn't you notice that it lacks direction?"
> "Yes. This thing has no direction."
> "Reexamine what you wrote—you are forcing history into the narrative." (*You as of Today*, 31-32)

Introduction: Eliot's journey in the Arab World

Since the translation of T. S. Eliot's works into Arabic in the 1930s, Arab intellectuals such as Badr Shakir AI-Sayyab and Nazik AI-Malaika have shown considerable attention to the way his poetry reflects the state of despair and loss that people in Europe experienced following WWI, and hence, they have employed his images of descruction and decay to represent the discontent of generations of Arab people. As Abd al-Sattar Jawad (2014) points out, "themes of death and resurrection, sacrifice and salvation, and faith and grace, as manifested in the modem world" have greatly influenced Al-Sayyab's poetry (8). In addition, themes produced by Eliot's *The Waste Land* like crisis, dislocation, fragmentation, and chaos

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attracted the Iraqi modernists who were undergoing severe alienation and frustration (17-18). Still, T. S. Eliot's influence on Arab literati has proved to be enduring and everlasting, affecting Arab writers in the 1960s and 1970s, too. Thus, this paper aims at examining how Jordanian novelist and poet Tayseer Al-Sboul (1939-1973) has adapted and appropriated in his novella *You as of Today* (1968) themes, techniques, and motifs from T. S. Eliot's poems "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock" (1917), *The Waste Land* (1922), and "The Hollow Men" (1925) to portray the state of disgruntlement that has engulfed the Arab World on the eve of and in the aftermath of the 1967 defeat to Israel. In other words, just as T. S. Eliot's poetry reflects a sense of alienation and estrangement in the aftermath of WWI through employing unfamiliar poetic techniques, drawing sordid images and highlighting repulsive themes, and so does Al-Sboul's novella which reflects a similar sense of dissatisfaction and deprivation among Arab citizens in the aftermath of the 1967 defeat to Israel.

Tayseer Al-Sboul was born on January 15, 1939, in the southern Jordanian city of Tafilah. He left home to join his brother, Shawkat, an engineer and high-ranking officer in the Jordanian Army, to attend school in the industrial city of Zarqa. After middle school, he attended high school in the capital city of Amman. He then received a scholarship from the government to study philosophy at the American University of Beirut, but he ended up studying law at the University of Damascus where he became politically involved (Akhtarkhavari 2016, xii-xiii). After completing his studies in Damascus, Al-Sboul returned to Jordan where he worked in various public jobs. He also took short-term positions in Bahrain and Saudi Arabia before returning to Jordan and worked as a writer, producer, and host of a radio talk show called "With the New Generation." He worked at the radio station until he took his life in 1973 (Akhtarkhavari xiii-xiv). Al-Sboul's *You as of Today* brought recognition to Jordanian writers when it won the prestigious *Al-Nahar* Award for the Best Arabic Novel in 1968 (Abu Nidal 2001, 67).

Published in 1968, a year after the 1967 defeat to Israel and the loss of the remainder of Palestine, Al-Sboul's novella has been commended for its innovative techniques to convey its protagonist's sense of fragmentation and disgruntlement. As the epigraph at the start of this paper shows, when people realise that Arabi, Al-Sboul's protagonist, is planning to publish a novel, they ask him numerous questions about his upcoming work. The quotation also draws our attention to the novella's thematic and aesthetic complexity, and hence, it raises questions on its relationship to the historical events it portrays. Commenting on the historical development of the Jordanian novel, Fahd Salameh (2000) argues that Jordanian novels which express social, cultural, political and economic spheres of the nation were not produced until the 1967 defeat (29). He adds that the different narrative techniques adopted in *As You of Today* "draws an analogy between the vague artistic structure of the novel and the indeterminacy of the Arab status quo" (45). Similarly, Walid Hamarneh (2017) argues that "[t]he collapse of the dominant ideologies of nationalism associated with Egypt's Nasser and the Syrian Ba'ath Party seems to have worked as an impetus for a new kind of novel writing in Jordan" (266). Hence, the questions and comments that people in the above epigraph make are valid and worthy of an extensive examination since the novel in Jordan was a late development when compared with the surrounding countries like Egypt, Syria, Lebanon, and Iraq (266).

Although researchers such as Muhsin Jassim Al-Musawi, Fakhri Salih, Samar Ruhi Al-Faysal, Ibrahim Al Saafin, Sa'īd Yaqṭīn, and Ahmad Y. Majdoubeh have already pointed out that Al-Sboul's novel is written in a fragmented structure (See: Al-Musawi 2003; Majdoubeh 2001), they have not touched on T. S. Eliot's influence on Al-Sboul, either directly or indirectly through the influence of Iraqi poet Badr Shakir AI-Sayyab on Al-Sboul. In fact, Al-Sboul himself wrote an article on T. S. Eliot's poetry and expressed in two other articles views on the links between poetry and the novel, and the appropriation of literary traditions that, I believe, are similar to those expressed by Eliot in his famous article "Tradition and the Individual Talent" (1919) which was translated into Arabic in the early 1950s. The first article by Al-Sboul discusses the issue of faith in Eliot's poetry, and he argues that Eliot's poetry does not represent the happiness of faith, but rather it embodies surrender to fate simply because Eliot represents a faithless culture (Al-Sboul 2005, 314). In another article, Al-Sboul argues that poetry and fiction influence each other aesthetically and formally despite the dissonance between them (Al-Sboul 2005, 288). He strongly advocates blurring the boundaries between the two genres, a technique that, I argue, he brilliantly employs in his novella *You as of Today* by appropriating themes, images, and techniques from Eliot's poetry, as Nazih Abu Nidal (68) and Khalil (2005, 105) point out. It is unsurprising then that Al-Sboul has borrowed themes, motifs, and tropes from Eliot's poetry to paint a bleaky image of the Arab World on the eve of and in the aftermath of the 1967 defeat to Israel.

In another article entitled "Our literature between heritage and contemporaneity," published in *The Complete Works* of Tayseer Al-Sboul (2005), Al-Sboul echoes some of Eliot's ideas proposed in "Tradition and the Individual Talent." Al-Sboul instists that a writer should "be aware of what the nation has presented, to interact with it, and to take a step forward from where he found it" (Al-Sboul 320). Al-Sboul's argument almost reflects that of T. S. Eliot who asserts that because "tradition" involves a historical sense, it "compels a man to write not merely with his own generation in his bones, but with a feeling that the whole of the literature of Europe" (Abrams et al. 2012, 2555). As Shusterman puts it, for Eliot "the meaning of a poet or a work of art depends on its relations with all the other elements in the tradition" (33). Shusterman maintains that "Eliot insists that tradition itself must be constantly reinterpreted and revised to be preserved" (43). Similarly, Materer insists that although Eliot "found the criterion for genuine art within the literary tradition, his innovative conception of that tradition also gave authority to the individual artist" (48). In the light of Shusterman's and Materer's comments and upon examining Al-Sboul's novella, one may argue that Al-Sboul draws on his Arab cultural heritage, on the one hand, and Western literary traditions, on the other hand, to reflect his generation's sense of despair and desolation following the loss of the remainder of Palestine in 1967. Seen from this angle, one may deduce that just like T. S. Eliot, Al-Sboul positions his ideas and artistry within national and universal literary traditions and conventions.

Arab writers, as Jabra Ibrahim Jabra (1971) argues, were fascinated by T. S. Eliot's "truly dynamic" view of tradition since tradition, according to T. S. Eliot, "was kept alive by the interaction between the new and the old through individual talent, which acted as a catalyst" (82-83). In fact, Eliot's influence on Al-Sboul is clear in the way the latter represents his protagonist's, and by extension the Arab people's, sense of desolation, isolation, and emptiness before and after the 1967 defeat. According to Terri

DeYoung (2000), "Eliot's work spoke to some preoccupations already highlighted in the work of Arab poets just emerging from experience of World War II" (5). This is evident, as Abd al-Sattar Jawad (2014) convincingly argues, in the poetry of Iraqi poets such as Badr Shakir AI-Sayyab and Nazik AI-Malaika, who initiated *vers libre* in Iraq first, then in Lebanon and the Arab world in general (6). Themes produced by Eliot's *The Waste Land* like crisis, dislocation, fragmentation, and chaos attracted the Iraqi modernists who were undergoing severe alienation and frustration (17-18). Seen from this perspective, Eliot's influence on Al-Sboul is also indirect since Al-Sboul was influenced by Al-Sayyab's poetry too.

In this context, Saddik M. Gohar (2008) argues that "Al-Sayyab incorporates Eliot's concept of the modern city transforming it into a poetic construct to confront the tyranny of the military regimes dominating the capital cities of the Arab world in the post war era" (1). In other words, the city as an urban space, a central motif in T. S. Eliot's poetry, is foregrounded in Al-Sayyab's poetry, which in turn has strongly influenced Al-Sboul's depictions of cities in his novella. Gohar's argument is echoed in Al-Sboul's representations of Damascus and Amman in *You as of Today*. Al-Sboul's city is introduced as a "sterile city of political corruption and impotence [… that is] dominated by police informers and sinful rulers who transform the […] city into a web of prisons and graveyards" (13). As will be explained subsequently, Al-Sboul's protagonist, Arabi, is a *flâneur* who meanders through the streets of Arab cities and unveils ugly socio-cultural and political realities that echo the sordid images in T. S. Eliot's poems.

Al-Sboul's novella takes place mainly in two Arab cities during the 1950s and 1960s. Although the two cities remain unnamed, it is not hard to identify them as Damascus and Amman: the former is where Arabi receives his university education, while the latter is where he returns after he graduates. For instance, Arabi's Damascus is a city of military coups and political instability. In the 1950s and 1960s rival parties in Syria were dogged in infinite conflicts. In this regard, Hinnebusch (2001) illustrates that "the overlap of regional and international conflicts with local ones after 1954 intensified political mobilisation and further propelled the rise of radical parties" (38). In 1958, Egypt and Syria merged as the United Arab Republic (41). This regime had fatal vulnerabilities and, in 1961, a military coup by a handful of conservative Damascene officers, acting for the bourgeoisie, ended the Syro-Egyptian union (41). On 8 March 1963, the Ba'athists toppled the faltering regime in a military coup (42). In seizing the power, the Ba'ath Party established what Hinnebusch refers to as "'populist authoritarianism'" which, he insists, "suffer[s] from a built-in contradiction between their attempt to mobilize yet control popular participation" (2). Al-Sboul's novel vividly represents how the period leading to the 1967 defeat is marked by continual ideological conflicts that contributed to the defeat since the army itself was divided in its loyalties to different parties and witnessed frequent purges among its ranks.

By the same token, Arabi's Amman is not far better than Damascus. Amman witnessed similar political upheavals in the 1950s and 1960s. The establishment of the State of Israel in 1948 had lasting repercussions on Jordan. In 1950, a resolution to unite both banks of the River Jordan was passed unanimously by the Jordanian Parliament (Milton-Edwards and Hinchliffe 2009, 29). The country faced an enormous task in absorbing the refugees who had fled or had been driven out from what was now Israel. Domestic politics throughout the 1950s was characterised by "immense change, upheaval and

eventually severe restrictions imposed on all aspects of political life" (33). Indeed, from 1953 to 1957, the forces of the Arab left, supported by Egyptian President Gamal Abdul Nasser's call for Arab nationalism, mounted pressure on Jordan (34). The situation further deteriorated in 1956 and 1957 with King Hussein facing "an attempted coup" (35). Eventually, "most aspects of political life in the country were suspended as […] political parties would be banned, full elections suspended and the Nablusi government dismissed" (35). As Milton-Edwards and Hinchliffe put it, "[d]omestic politics in Jordan throughout the 1960s were limited to say the least" (38). In June 1967, the war with Israel erupted and its consequences were devastating for Jordan as it lost the West Bank to Israel (38). In addition, the economic infrastructure had to bear the additional responsibility of accommodating half a million Palestinian refugees who fled from their homes in the West Bank (70). Apparently, Arabi, Al-Sboul's *flâneur*, uncovers Damascus's and Amman's secrets just as Eliot's *flâneur* decades ago has meandered through London's streets and opened it for scrutiny.

As the following sections show, Al-Sboul exposes the socio-political maladies that engulfed Arab societies on the eve of the 1967 defeat. In other words, Al-Sboul's novel depicts how corruption, dictatorship, partisanism, and rivalry over authority made the 1967 defeat predictable. Salameh (2000), Majdoubeh (2001), and Al-Musawi (2003) have pointed out how the novelist uses fragmented narrative scenes to reflect themes of alienation, desolation and estrangement. Although there is an agreement among critics that Al-Sboul's novella employs innovative narrative techniques, they have not even hinted at Eliot's influence on Al-Sboul, a gap that this study aims at redressing. For instance, Majdoubeh argues that Al-Sboul's novella is postmodernist. I argue that T. S. Eliot's influence on Al-Sboul's novella can explain Majdoubeh's proposition since, as Bernard Sharratt (1994) succinctly notes, "Eliot's work initiates a logic which can illuminate current notions of postmodernism, and that his ways of negotiating his particular cultural situation pre-echo some features of what is currently meant by postmodernism" (229). In other words, "the deeper superficialities of postmodernism are already at work in Eliot's construction of history as essentially a matter of literary taste" (230). This practically means that Majdoubeh's description of Al-Sboul's novella as postmodernist does not contradict my argument that one can trace T. S. Eliot's influence on Al-Sboul because the latter's use of fragmentation, which for Majdoubeh is a postmodernist technique, has its genesis in T. S. Eliot's poetry.

T. S. Eliot's Influence on Al-Sboul: Themes, Motifs, and Techniques

1- The speaker / narrator as a *flâneur*

The speaker in "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock" and some anonymous speakers in *The Waste Land* are *flâneurs* who guide us through the streets of London. By the same token, Al-Sboul's Arabi is a *flâneur* who meanders through the streets of Damascus and Amman. Unlike Joyce's, Fitzgerald's, Woolf's and Baudelaire's *flâneurs*, T. S. Eliot's *flâneur* is despondent and bears his generation's disgruntlement because of the destruction that WWI caused. Similarly, Al-Sboul's Arabi carries a sense of disappointment and loss, which reflects that of his generation, as he witnesses the humiliating consequences of the 1967 War on Arab nations. Hence, Al-Sboul models his angry and discontented

flâneur on that of T. S. Eliot rather than on Joyce's, Fitzgerald's, Woolf's and Baudelaire's *flâneurs*. In this context, DeYoung notes that Eliot's poetry is an urban poetry that Arab poets have drawn on to describe Arab cities as sites of "social dislocations and exacerbated maldistribution of wealth" (6). As DeYoung puts it, "the alienated characters of Eliot's poems became apt models for the portrayal of similar figures in Arabic poetry of the 1950s and 1960s" (6). In Al-Sboul's case, his representation of Arab cities was influenced by Al-Sayyab, who in turn, was influenced by Eliot's representation of cities in his poetry as illustrated earlier.

According to Keith Tester (1994), "the *flâneur* is used as a figure to illuminate issues of city life irrespective of time and place" (16). At the start of "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock," the speaker invites the reader to meander through the streets with him:

> Let us go then, you and I,
> […]
> Let us go, through certain half-deserted streets,
> The muttering retreats
> Of restless nights in one-night cheap hotels
> And sawdust restaurants with oyster-shells. (Abrams et al. 2524, ll. 1-7)

The journey to which the speaker invites the reader, as John Xiros Cooper (2006) argues, "unveils a society where life seems little more than a masquerade, an empty ritual of idle talk and narcissism" (41-42). Similarly, the speaker in *The Waste Land* is another *flâneur*, a pilgrim who is "unsure of the path to the holy place" (78). In the last stanza of the first section, the speaker takes the reader on a tour through the streets of London:

Unreal City,

> Under the brown fog of a winter dawn,
> A crowd flowed over London Bridge, so many,
> I had not thought death had undone so many.
> […]
> Flowed up the hill and down King William Street,
> To where Saint Mary Woolnoth kept the hours
> […]
> 'You! hypocrite lecteur!—mon semblable,—mon frère!" (Abrams et al. 2532, ll. 60-76)

As can be seen in the above two quotations, Eliot's *flâneur*s bear the brunt of the alienating repercussions of WWI. They represent a generation of traumatized people who witnessed atrocities during the war. As we move around London, Cooper notes, we encounter all those images of waste and decay that bring us to abjection (78). Eliot's allusion to Baudelaire in the last line of the "Unreal City" blurs, as Davidson (1994) argues, "the narrator's voice with Baudelaire, Stetson, and the reader" (128). Eliot's speaker describes the damage that WWI left and paints an image of an infernal modern city. Eliot's representation

of modern cities as hellish is echoed in Al-Sboul's novella to reflect the deteriorating conditions that Arab people have been experiencing on the eve of and in the aftermath of the 1967 defeat.

In fact, Arabi strolls through the streets of Damascus and Amman to show how Arab cities have become sites where "death, corruption, prostitution and treachery prevail" (Gohar 7). For instance, when Arabi looks at the election signs while walking down the streets of Damascus, he feels disgruntled: "I continued to move my gaze between the banners and the shops. Inside me was nothing but emptiness" (25). This sense of restlessness reflects Arabi's dissatisfaction with the Arab World's sociopolitical disorderliness and chaos. This is reinforced in his description of the refugees who started to flood Arab cities after the Nakbah: "I used to see them everywhere in Hajir and at the capital here and there. […] Between the alleys and the tents, their children were always muddy with dirty faces, as if they were birds that had just come out of a chimney" (21). Arabi tries to understand what it means to be a refugee by portraying the hard conditions that they endure.

Arabi's frustration and disappointment is evident when he realizes that Israel defeated Arab armies. He comments on how defeat crushes people's hopes and aspirations. Arabi can be seen as a *flâneur* since "the *flâneur* says important things about how we know who we are, how we become who we are, and how others become who we think they are" (Tester, 8). Arabi documents the reactions of the masses as they find out the truth. He describes to the reader in details how joy and jubilations turn abruptly into disappointment and failure:

> We crossed the main square, rushing on with the running crowd, while the sound of multiple radio stations filled the air. […] We saw people running to the bakeries. Like them, we pushed our way in and bought extra rations of bread but did not buy any vegetables" (36).

The above scene is reminiscent of Eliot's representation of how the crowds are flowing over London Bridge pointlessly: "When things were over, Citizen Arabi walked through the streets aimlessly, meandering around like a dizzy fly" (37). As a *flâneur*, Arabi conveys to the reader the sense of destruction and loss that the defeat inflicted on him and his fellow citizens. It is through the *flâneur*'s eyes that we see the chaotic cities that Al-Sboul vividly depicts.

2- The cat-like fog / The cat

The extended metaphor of fog as a cat at the start of T. S. Eliot's "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock" remains one of the unforgettable images in the poem:

The yellow fog that rubs its *back* upon the *window-panes*,
The yellow smoke that rubs its *muzzle* on the *window-panes*,
Licked its tongue into the corners of the *evening*,
Lingered upon the pools that stand in drains,
Let fall upon its *back* the soot that falls from chimneys,
Slipped by the terrace, made a sudden *leap*,
And seeing that it was a soft October night,

> Curled once about the house, and fell asleep. (Abrams et al. 2524, ll. 15-22, italics mine)

According to J. C. C. Mays (1994), "the fog imaged as a cat" is one of the images that "balloon away from their referents and assume an uncontrollable life of their own" (111). Similarly, Al-Sboul's novella starts with the protagonist's father chasing a cat that resurfaces at critical points in the narrative. However, while in Eliot's poem, the image of fog as a cat reflects a sense of quietude, Al-Sboul uses the cat-related episodes to highlight acts of literal and metaphorical violence and brutality in his society. In this sense, Al-Sboul imbues the cat with new meanings that reproduce themes of socio-cultural decay and disintegration in the Arab World on the eve of and in the aftermath of the 1967 defeat.

In Al-Sboul's novella, a white cat is violently and mercilessly murdered at the onset by Arabi's father:

> She was white, walked gracefully, and then *licked* her lips. […] The cat cowered in the corner against the wall. He followed her and tried to hit her on the head, but missed and instead hit her *back*. She rolled over twice and then took off toward the *window*. […] She *jumped*. […] She reached up to the *window* again, meowing loudly, her claws screeching against the glass. […] Her *nose* bled more, and then she was there, motionless with her eyes still open. (3, italics mine)

The words that Al-Sboul uses to describe the cat's movements and the setting are strikingly similar to those used by Eliot. This horrifying incident has lasting damaging consequences on the helpless narrator: "He must no doubt have felt afraid, angry, disgusted, and sorry for the cat-as we later learn from several references to the event" (Majdoubeh 294-295). The next day, when Arabi goes to school, he "saw the cat's decapitated body and her severed head" (5). Years later, Arabi tells his friend Saber about the death of the cat: "Arabi was wondering who could have mutilated the cat after it was killed by his father" (5). Also, when he hears someone saying that they will turn a Populist's skull into an ashtray, Arabi thinks "about chopping off the head of a cat" (16).

But the most shocking image that Al-Sboul draws for the cat is the one that Arabi remembers towards the end of the novella after he saw the fatal damages that the enemy inflicted on his nation:

> Once, I saw in the middle of the road a cat hit by a car, blood coming out of her ear and the side of her face. She was running in a circle no more than one meter in size, her eyes in a fixed position, and she constantly moved. […] Now, I understood how she felt. (43)

Arabi identifies with the suffering of the cat since the 1967 defeat has shown him what it means to be beaten down and humiliated. Indeed, in the novella, "acts of terror and oppression" (Salameh 46), like the ones cited in this section, continually haunt the reader and drive him to be detached and isolated.

Thus, the way the cat is murdered by the narrator's father and the subsequent sordid images of mutilation, torture, and agonizing death reflect the cruelty, mercilessness, and wickedness in which the narrator's society is submerged. In this sense, while Al-Sboul borrows the image of the cat from Eliot's poem and, just like Eliot, places it at the start of his text, he, unlike Eliot, depicts the cruelty and

heartlessness with which it is killed to portray the harsh realities that Arab people suffer from because of the ruthless ruling regimes, on the one hand, and, on the other hand, the vicious enemy that is ready to murder and mutilate its victims mercilessly.

3- The bar scene

Al-Sboul chooses a bar as the setting for a conversation on contemporaneous politics between Arabi and his friend to depict how, on the eve of the 1967 defeat, most Arab nations were involved in pointless political rivalries that contributed to creating fatal divisions in the ranks of Arab armies, politicians, and citizens. This scene, I argue, replicates a scene in the final section of the second part of *The Waste Land* which ends with a hasty conversation between two women in a bar while the bartender announces that he is closing the bar for the night. It is mainly a conversation about "the sad domestic life of Lil" (Davidson 128) and how Lil is supposed to get ready for her husband's return from duty on the frontlines:

> When Lil's husband got demobbed, I said—
> I didn't mince my words, I said to her myself,
> HURRY UP PLEASE ITS TIME
> Now Albert's coming back, make yourself a bit smart. (Abrams et al. 2534, ll. 139-142)

As the above quotation shows, Lil's private life cannot be isolated from international affairs since she must prepare herself for her husband's return from the trenches. In this sense, the bar in Eliot's poem is a space in which private and public issues constantly mix.

Similarly, in Al-Sboul's novella, the bar is an important place in which conversations about personal and public matters intermingle. Arabi and his friend skip a Party rally and retreat to Arabi's favorite bar which is small and with poor lighting (4). Just as the bartender is hurrying up his customers in Eliot's poem, the bartender in Al-Sboul's novella does not care about his customers and he even seems dismissive: "The bartender, Abu-Marouf, never seemed interested in his customers. He served very few appetizers with the drinks and would get annoyed if the customers asked for more, which he did not bother to hide" (5). In the bar, the two speak about their own personal fears, memories, and apprehensions, oblivious of the Party's rally that they deliberately missed. The scene speaks volumes about Arabi's and Saber's disappointment with the stagnant political situation in the Arab World. The omniscient narrator states that "Arabi despise[s] listening to political speakers and poets who stomped their feet while reciting political poems, bearing in mind that colonialism, which they were angry about, was not under their feet" (6). At one point, Arabi expresses his dissatisfaction with the slogans that his Party propagates: "Then he remembered how the Party's pamphlets bored him. He realized they all said the same thing and decided that there was no need to distribute them weekly" (13).

Al-Sboul uses the metaphor of rotten nuts to describe the emptiness and worthlessness of Arab political rhetoric. When asked while in the bar about his opinion on the nature of the current crisis in Arab countries, the omniscient narrator informs us that Arabi "was busy looking for a good, fresh nut in the large pile of nuts [...]. All the nuts there were rotten, too" (19). Thus, Arabi is a disappointed young man who discovers that partisans are selling hollow slogans to people since they do not have a clear vision of

how to solve the nation's chronic problems: "May colonialism fall? Yes, but how? The pamphlets provided no satisfactory answers" (13). According to Hinnebusch, from the early 1950s, the repeated occurrences of coups in Syria, where Arabi receives his university education, resulted in the creation of a "praetorianism-a politics of military intrigue, coup and countercoup" (28). This eventually destabilized the civilian government and precluded stable military rule since politicization fragmented the army into factions along regional, ideological, and sectarian lines and by loyalty to rival political parties. (28). Al-Sboul's novella shows that the defeat, to quote Salameh's words, "revealed the hollowness of the slogans that were current during the previous years and their failure to meet the hopes and aspirations of the nation" (39-40). In this sense, Al-Sboul's novella depicts how, on the eve of the 1967 defeat, most Arab nations were embroiled in relentless and futile political rivalries that substantially contributed to demoralizing Arab armies, politicians, and citizens.

4- Fragmentations as a technique

Eliot's *The Waste Land* is noted for its fragmentary structure. For instance, Lawrence Rainey (2017) argues that the poem "has neither a plot nor narrative coherence, but the semblance of a plot, the likeness of a plot that swiftly dissolves into illusion" (76). Likewise, Steve Ellis (2007) points out that one salient feature of *The Waste Land* is its "increasingly abrupt shifts from scene to scene, speaker to speaker" (6). In fact, Eliot's poems, *The Waste Land*, "The Love Song of J. Alfred of Prufrock," and "The Hollow Men," are replete with religious, literary, and mythical allusions. According to Robert Jewett (1982), Eliot does this to support his contrast of past and present (97). Indeed, Eliot alludes to a whole scene from the past and follows it with a scene from the present to show the sharp contrast between the two epochs. Similarly, Davidson states that new readers of *The Waste Land* and Eliot's other poems are still likely to be "bewildered by the many voices, allusions, and shifting tones of the poem" because he "disperse[s] clear meanings into other contexts, […], and blur[s] boundaries between texts" (128). In a way, this incoherence drives readers to question Eliot's goals behind juxtaposing seemingly unrelated quotations, ideas and images.

Al-Sboul follows in Eliot's footsteps by alluding to different historical events and literary texts in his novella to convey a sense of fragmentation and disintegration that his protagonist experiences in a meaningless and chaotic world. As Majdoubeh (2001) contends, "the novel is […] characteristically […] fragmentary" (287). Yet, Majdoubeh does not attribute this apparent fragmentation to T. S. Eliot's influence on Al-Sboul, and he insists that the novella is postmodernist in nature. As indicated earlier in this article, T. S. Eliot's influence on Al-Sboul can be traced in the latter's written response to and commentary on T. S. Eliot's famous essay "Tradition and the Individual Talent." Just like Eliot, Al-Sboul achieves fragmentation, which reflects his protagonist's alienation and estrangement, by inserting allusions to historical events. For instance, the novella refers to the conflict between the third caliph Othman bin Affan and Imam Ali bin Abi Talib, the fourth caliph:

> Why had they turned against the Imam? He had stood by the entrance of the city gate in the evening, gazing at the sky; his tears flowed over his white beard, and he

> said, O world, tempt someone else! O world, tempt someone else! Tempt someone else. I divorce thee thrice. (7-8)

Othman's appointment as a caliph before Imam Ali who was subsequently assassinated initiated internal conflict in the Islamic state and ultimately led to the division between Sunni and Shi'i Muslims. As Akhtarkhavari puts it, Al-Sboul's novella is "frank in its treatment of critical social and historical issues that many shy from approaching" (xii). Al-Sboul's revisionist view of history is of paramount importance and is reminiscent of T. S. Eliot's technique of linking past events to present ones in a way that opens historical records for debates.

Another important historical event that Al-Sboul refers to is related to renowned Muslim leader Muhammad Abu Al-Qasim Al-Thaqafi who led the Muslim troops to the borders of China. He was appointed by the Umayyad Caliph Al-Waleed Ibn Abdul-Malik. However, his successor, Sulayman Ibn Abdel-Malik, deposed Al-Thaqafi and ordered him to return to Iraq because of his relationship with Al-Hajjaj, the former governor of Basra, whom the new caliph despised. Upon his return, Al-Thaqafi was tortured for months and then killed (Akhtarkhavari 47):

> He [Al-Thaqafi] whispered to himself: They lost me, and what a lad they lost! On a bad day, I was silent after arrest. Patience, in a struggle with death, plunged its daggers into my chest. […] The caliph ordered that they skin a cow, have the young man placed in the hide, and sew the hide shut. He then ordered them to light a fire and throw the hide, with the young man inside it, into the fire. (11)

By narrating this episode, Al-Sboul highlights a history of violence and ruthlessness that is often ignored and overlooked in the Arabo-Islamic history. Arabi comments on this incident by saying: "Things got bad a long time ago. What do I know? They may have never been good" (34). This revisionist view of history makes Arabi look at the dark side of the past. In this context, Akhtarkhavari argues that Al-Sboul's "journey back into history enriched his writing, providing an added depth and dimension" (xv). Thus, Al-Sboul draws on historical events to highlight Arabi's rejection of the notion that history is linear; he insists on opening the annals of history to constructive scrutiny, a task that puts him in direct conflict with traditional powerhouses and contributes to his alienation and isolation.

What triggered Arabi to look at the past is the chaotic sociopolitical circumstances that Arab countries have been going through since independence. Frequent coup d'états, political instability, social hypocrisy, and gruesome partisan skirmishes are different aspects of deep sociopolitical and cultural diseases that have their roots in a superficially and pretentiously glorious history of a progressive Arab nation. In a way, Arabi connects the past to the present, finding that violence, brutality, and hostility are malaises that have plagued Arab and Islamic nations for centuries. In this way, Al-Sboul comments on the past and links it to the Arab nation's miserable present. As Akhtarkhavari puts it, Al-Sboul "skillfully weave[s] symbols and events rooted in Arab religious and literary traditions, historical references, and cultural heritage into the narrative" (xv). According to Abu Nidal, as Arabi endures agonizing experiences, he foregrounds "historical accounts of persecution" (68). Abu Nidal insists that "Arabi is actually a symbol of the Arab citizen, and the Arab consciousness overloaded with a history of vice and current defeat, oppression and persecution" (68). Al-Sboul, thus, turns to history in an attempt to

thoroughly understand the horrible conditions that Arab nations have been enduring since the second half of the twentieth century. Alluding to historical events in the novella renders it structurally messy and jumbled. Purposefully, this disorderly structure reflects Arabi's fragmented and incoherent identity. In this way, Al-Sboul's protagonist resembles T. S. Eliot's J. Alfred Prufrock.

5- The corpse

In the last stanza of the first section of *The Waste Land*, the speaker stops a person named Stetson and asks:

> That corpse you planted last year in your garden,
> Has it begun to sprout? Will it bloom this year?
> Or has the sudden frost disturbed its bed? (Abrams et al. 2012, 2532, ll. 71-73)

The speaker does not get an answer. According to Cooper, the corpse is one of the "central images in making the concept of abjection a way of understanding the poem's moods and the demeanor of its characters" (64). Similarly, in Al-Sboul's novella, a corpse that Arabi spots near the destroyed bridge after the defeat, carries meanings of humiliation, despair and anguish. He elaborates:

> The soldier […] had been dead for three days. For three days, he was left alone by the bridge, dressed in his official yellow uniform, his heavy shoes still shining, a terrible stench, but his heavy shoes were still shining. […] Noon came, and the soldier was still by the river. (34)

Few pages later, the narrator smells "[a] foul odor" (42). He maintains: "The odor intensified. I desperately looked for its source. I saw a woven sieve, and under it lay the body of a dead soldier in full uniform" (43). Certainly, Al-Sboul is trying to highlight the gravity of the defeat. According to Akhtarkhavari, Al-Sboul "carries not only the weight of the personal defeat he felt after the 1967 War and the stress of daily life, but also the worries of a whole generation that had to live, struggle, endure, and try to understand the trauma" (xxiv). The repulsive sensory images that Al-Sboul employs are reminiscent of Eliot's sordid images. They also intensify the absurdity of the situation. The image of the dead soldier with shiny shoes speaks volumes for the crushing defeat that Arab people have endured and will continue to trudge under its burden for decades to come.

6- The closing lines / pages

The opening lines of "What the Thunder Said" in *The Waste Land* portray scenes from the crucifixion of Christ. The lines describe arid land because of the lack of water:

> Here is no water but only rock
> Rock and no water and the sandy road
> […]
> Drip drop drip drop drop drop drop
> But there is no water. (Abrams et al. 2012, 2540-2541, ll. 331-359)

As Davidson puts it, in this section, "repetition suggests a pointless circularity" (129). Cooper also argues that "[f]rom this point in the poem, the mood of abjection ripples out in concentric circles. Again and again, particular images […] create a pattern that does not allow the abject human subject any relief" (69-70).

A similar sense of abjection and despondency is represented at the end of Al-Sboul's novella when the narrator describes how Arab soldiers are tantalized and humiliated by the enemy:

> I had seen my people in the desert, the thirsty soldiers, wandering aimlessly. It was summer; I saw the general's men waving water in front of the soldiers, then hiding it and laughing. I saw my people falling, spreading their arms on the hot sand, tormented by a sweet love for their homeland. (45-46)

As the above lines clearly show, the defeat was accompanied by a sense of humiliation and shame. Just as *The Waste Land* was written after WWI to describe the sense of disgruntlement and disillusionment that overtook people, *You as of Today* paints a bleak vision in the aftermath of the 1967 defeat. According to Jabra, Arab writers "responded so passionately to 'The Wasteland' because they, too, went through an experience of universal tragedy, not only in World War II, but also, and more essentially, in the Palestine debacle and its aftermath" (83). According to Jabra, *The Waste Land* "and its implications seemed strangely to fit. A whole order of things had crumbled, and the theme of the sterile 'cracked earth' thirsty for rain seemed the most insistent of all" (83). One may argue Al-Sboul's images reflect "the personal and political turmoil" that Arabi endures as a result of wrong decisions and irresponsible actions taken by "corrupt political leadership[s]" (Akhtarkhavari xvii). The protagonist "is aware of the intensity of the social and political problems that plague his society and attempts to understand them, only to discover that they are too complicated and absurd" (xvii). The worries of the nation remain central to Arabi's inner search; thus, as he looks for himself, "he looks into the soul of the nation, trying to understand it and trying to understand himself through it" (xix).

7- Hollow Men

In "The Hollow Men," Eliot describes the moral and spiritual emptiness of modern life by using the image of the scarecrows. Eliot writes:

> We are the hollow men
> We are the stuffed men
> Leaning together
> Headpiece filled with straw. Alas!
> (Abrams et al. 2543, ll. 1-4)

T. S. Eliot's use of the above image reflects his frustration and disappointment of the status quo in the wake of WWI. He describes the collapse of social, cultural and moral values in a world strictly governed by capitalist and materialist principles. As Everett Gillis (1961) rightly indicates, the chorus of Eliot's "The Hollow Men" pinpoints "their spiritual status to be hollow men, straw effigies, caught in a stance of frozen immobility" (464). He insists that both "The Hollow Men" and *The Waste Land* "have the same desert landscape characterized by images of desiccation and ruin; their spiritual values are similarly

distorted and perverted" (467). According to Ellis, the hollow men "were never […] truly alive […]. Treated with disdain, and hardly remarked on […], they are condemned to spend eternity in a kind of waiting-room" (65). Ellis maintains that T. S. Eliot's poem emphasizes "the inability of the straw men to carry actions to fruition […], be these of worship or […] involving the violence or evil necessary to at least secure the status of damnation" (68). In other words, in the above quotation from "The Hollow Men," T. S. Eliot critiques the state of inertia and hibernation that characterizes people's attitudes and behaviors because they are disappointed and peeved. This image of paralysis and numbness is omnipresent in Al-Sboul's novella, and it encapsulates the situation that Arabi observes especially in the aftermath of the 1967 defeat.

This sense of ineptness, emptiness, and paralysis that T. S. Eliot's lines brilliantly depict is vividly portrayed in Al-Sboul's novella to reflect a similar state of ineffectiveness and ineptitude that engulfed the Arab World after the 1967 defeat and replaced feelings of optimism, hopefulness and euphoria before the war. Salameh pinpoints "the inertia and stagnation are reflected in almost every feature of the experiences the protagonist and his world undergo" (46). Yet, despite his helpful analysis, Salameh does not consider the implications of the image of a "punching bags stuffed with hay" that Al-Sboul uses to describe the status of Arab countries in the post-1967 War. This image, I argue, is reminiscent of T. S. Eliot's unpleasant portrayal of the hollow men and reflects Arab people's loss of dignity and honor. Arabi clearly sees the grim side of the situation in which millions of Arabs live after the 1967 defeat:

> It appeared to me that the matter was a simple question that needed an answer: are we people, or are we *punching bags stuffed with hay*, used by boxers from the time of Hulagu, when the Mongol conquered us? (43, italics mine)

Arabi desperately repeats the question: "Now, I wondered, was this a nation or a hay-stuffed punching bag?" (43-44) Certainty, Al-Sboul's novel unambiguously and affirmatively answers this question. According to Asher Susser (2000), after the 1967 War, "[t]he messianic promise of Nasserism was shattered in humiliating defeat," and therefore, Arab people realized that "the progressive formula for power and modernity was nothing but an illusion" (103). Hence, Al-Sboul's image of "a hay-stuffed punching bag" to describe the state of paralysis that Arab people endure in the aftermath of the 1967 defeat echoes T. S. Eliot's representation of the hollow men whom he depicts as "quiet and meaningless" (Abrams et al. 2543, l. 10).

Conclusion

The paper has explored T. S. Eliot's influence on Jordanian writer Tayseer Al-Sboul's novella *You as of Today* (1968). Appropriating themes, images, and motifs from T. S. Eliot's "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock," *The Waste Land,* and "The Hollow Men," Al-Sboul's novella has portrayed the socio-cultural and political rottenness that swamped Arab nations on the eve of the 1967 defeat to Israel. Al-Sboul's article "Our literature between heritage and contemporaneity," which draws on T. S. Eliot's influential essay "Tradition and the Individual Talent," is just one clue that hints at the latter's influence on the former. Moreover, a careful examination of the images and narrative techniques that Al-Sboul

employs in his novella further demonstrates T. S. Eliot's influence on Al-Sboul. As Al-Sboul's protagonist meanders through the streets of Damascus and Amman, visits bars, deals with corrupt partisans, and eventually witnesses loss and destruction after the war, he simultaneously narrates how young Arab people's aspirations of progress and advancement have evaporated due to despotism, partisanism, and political intrigues. Just as T. S. Eliot's poetry depicts scenes of disillusionment, loss, and degeneration before and after WWI, Al-Sboul's novella vividly shows how Arab lands have turned into wastelands because of Arab rulers' continual manipulation of the masses and selling them false hopes and dreams. In this sense, on the eve of the 1967 defeat, Arab regimes, to quote Hinnebusch once more, used "patrimonialism, militarism and populism" to build power but, unfortunately, these techniques "enervated the economic base of the state while the expansion of its functions outran its implementation capacity" (9). In other words, Arab dictators have turned the masses on the eve of the 1967 War into, to quote Gillis's words on T. S. Eliot's hollow men, a "form without shape, shade without color, paralyzed force, gesture without motion" (474-475). Al-Sboul's novella brilliantly captures this gloomy image and exposes the sociopolitical malaise that made defeat in the 1967 War inevitable.

Published a year after the defeat, Al-Sboul's novella belongs to "June-war-related novels." As Salameh explains it, the disconnection which Al-Sboul presents in the structure of his novel "practically reflects the fracture within the consciousness of the Arab intelligentsia after the defeat" (47). In adopting "a fragmentary (and fragmenting) narrative strategy," the novella is most expressive, as Majdoubeh (2001) argues, since it vividly expresses "the fragmentation and incoherence of 'Arabi's world" (290-291). Al-Sboul's novella is loaded with personal intensity and cultural, sociopolitical implications, producing a "tex[t] woven in perfect harmony to tell stories that are fully personal, yet steeped in history and tradition" (Akhtarkhavari 2016, xxv). In fact, history and tradition are among the key concepts that mark Eliot's position on creativity and originality as he explains in his seminal essay "Tradition and the Individual Talent," a subject-matter that Al-Sboul also reflected on in some of his essays. It is not surprising that Al-Sboul has drawn on Eliot's poetry to paint a gloomy image of the sociopolitical scene in the Arab world in the years leading to the 1967 defeat. Al-Sboul's representations of alienating Arab cities, violent and cruel scenes, deceitful and fraudulent political parties, despairing and disillusioned Arab citizens, and broken down and destroyed armies reflect how Al-Sboul has skillfully appropriated images, techniques, and motifs from T. S. Eliot's poetry to unveil his protagonist's discontent with social and political forces that harshly shape his life. By drawing on T. S. Eliot's poetry, Al-Sboul shows how the 1967 defeat shattered young Arab people's hopes of progress and development and undermined their belief in political parties that offered people nothing but hollow slogans and empty rhetoric.

تأثير ت. س. إليوت على رواية "أنت منذ اليوم" للكاتب الأردني تيسير السبول

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الملخص

تهدف هذه الدراسة إلى استعراض تأثير الكاتب ت. س. إليوت المباشر وغير المباشر على رواية "أنت منذ اليوم" للكاتب الأردنيّ تيسير السبول التي نُشِرَت في عام (1968). بادئ ذي بدء، فإنّ بطل رواية السبول، عربي، هو شخص يتجول في شوارع المدن العربيّة ويكشف عن حقائق إجتماعيّة وثقافيّة وسياسيّة قبيحة تعكس الصور البشعة التي استخدمها إليوت في شعره، وثانياً، تظهر في رواية السبول صور مثل القطة والجثة، وثالثًا، فانّ رواية "أنت منذ اليوم" مجزأة في البنية تمامًا مثل قصيدة إليوت "الأرض اليباب"، علاوة على ذلك، فإنّ صور اليأس التي يرسمها إليوت في الجزء الأخير من قصيدة "الأرض اليباب" تكاد تتكرر في رواية السبول لتعكس حالة اليأس والخسارة التي عاشها الشعب العربي بعد هزيمة 1967 بما يشابه حالة اليأس والعجز التي عاشها الناس في أوروبا بعد الحرب العالمية الأولى. وأخيراً، يصف عربيٌ الأمة العربيّة بأنها "أكياس ملاكمة محشوة بالقش"، وهو وصف يذكرنا بالرجال الجوف في قصيدة إليوت. ومن خلال الاعتماد على شعر إليوت، الذي أثَّر في أجيال من المثقفين العرب منذ ترجمة أعماله إلى اللغة العربيّة في ثلاثينيات القرن العشرين، يُوضّح السبول كيف بددت هزيمة 1967 آمال الشباب العربي في التقدم والتطور ويثير تساؤلات حول جدوى السياسة العربيّة حينذاك والانتماءات الأيديولوجيّة.

الكلمات المفتاحية: ت .س. إليوت، التأثير، تيسير السبول، "أنت منذ اليوم"، الأدب الأردنيّ.

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