

objective condition for an explicit or implicit alliance between the writer who refuses injustice and the reader who lives under this injustice. The sense of repression is the factor that unites the reader and the writer, the intellectual and the ordinary man who dreams of bread and human dignity.

THE DECLINE OF POETRY

Between theory and the novel there remains a narrow space for poetry. In fact, there is a big place for the poets, while the space of the poetic text diminishes. The poem is not equal to the poet in the present Arab cultural arena. A group of poets have managed to accentuate their positions and importance, thanks to the cultural and informational roles they play, thanks to their own cultural activity. Yet, for objective reasons beyond their control, they have failed to create the suitable conditions for reading their poetry in a broad and real sense, because the position of poetry, its ups and downs, is always bound by the social conditions.

Adonis (Syrian - born poet residing in Lebanon) has maintained his cultural significance and effectiveness due to his leading role in renovating Arab poetry, his journalistic activity and theoretical contributions to discussions about tradition, innovation, modernism and poetic language, in addition to his political essays and his struggle for freedom of thought and creativity. Similar is the status of the Palestinian Mahmoud Darwish who combines the poet, political leader and journalist in his personality; his name has been associated with the Palestinian cause to the point of becoming almost a symbol for it. Almost the same can be said about several other poets, such as Saadi Yousef of Iraq, Nizar Qabbani of Syria, Abdul Muti Hijazi of Egypt, etc. They are practicing journalism, teaching and political writing. Thus, poetry is only one of many aspects of the poet, though it is what brought the others into being.

The development of the social life in the Arab world, which is characterized by despotism, hunger and defeat, leaves little room for poetry if it does not directly deal with the daily problems of the individual. The reader is not ready to bother about anything except an explicitly political text which has nothing to do with poetry. We live in circumstances of illiteracy or semi-literacy, lack of education in poetry in particular and literature in general.

While the general national and social upsurge in the fifties and sixties led to the appearance of great poets (Al Sayyab, Hawi, Adonis, Qabbani, Darwish, Yousef, Hijazi, etc.) and provided conditions for the rise of poetry readers, the recent social changes have created a different cultural, political and psychological climate. The circumstances of oppression do not allow any direct contact between the poet and his audience. The book or the magazine, when released by the censor, remain the sole place of meeting. Besides, the poet is increasingly becoming an introvert, talking about the alienation of the soul and the triviality of existence, often plunging into the abyss of abstract stylistics, beyond the reader who doesn't find any trace of his problems in it. In other words, while repression has eliminated the possibility of direct contact between the poet and his audience, poetic formalism has eliminated the possibility of indirect contact. In addition, the conditions of hunger and deprivation oblige repressed people to look for something other than poetry.

The crisis of Arab poetry is, in fact, part of the overall crisis engulfing Arab society. The development of poetry requires freedom, the right to dream, a higher cultural level, open windows to the culture of humanity, liberated mentality, belief in man as a supreme value, etc. The dominant conditions in the Arab world reject and deny all such things; they create desperate, introverted people with an extremely narrow consciousness and culture. Thus, the general sociocultural situation besieges both poetry and the poetry reader. Such conditions present still another problem connected with the development of modern Arab poetry. Modern Arab poetry emerged during a period of political-cultural ascent, but the development of social life has denied it the opportunity of establishing its positions. It has been there without achieving ultimate victory. Modern Arab poetry has been defending new concepts in obvious contradiction, at fierce war, with all the prevalent reactionary culture. The transformations of the last twenty years have come to besiege the beginnings which have not established their victory. Poetic modernity, therefore, has looked as if it were an elitist appeal incapable of communicating its concepts to the ordinary reader. The reactionary press, together with the decline of the critical poetry movement, has contributed to this state of affairs and almost made a caricature of modernist poetical creativity. This means that defense of poetical modernity inevitably involves confrontation with the dominant cultural and political values in circumstances where everything creative and rational seems to be in crisis, fighting while retreating.

The Arab reader, through both home and school, has gotten used to a certain Quranic language of rhetoric and a one-dimensional perspective of poetry. Modern poetry has attacked traditional poetry, and looked for a new language. Although some poets in the past believed that the battle of poetry took place within poetry itself, consequent social developments have proven that the battle of poetic modernity is part of the entire battle for social innovation. Such deficient consciousness of adoring poetry, while forgetting reality, may have been one of the reasons for the present crisis in poetry. The crisis is manifested in the fact that poetry remains revolving around itself without anything genuinely new, in the absence of criticism capable of distinguishing between good and bad poetry, and with the predominance of naive poetry, there are hundreds of poets in the Arab world. Above all, the crisis is manifested in the increasing distance between the reader and the poet. The possibility of getting easily published is limited to a few poets.

Generally speaking: Great poetry deals with the great issues of man; Arab reality has reduced man to lost atoms occupied with the search for banal needs. Such a reality posits many tasks for the poetry movement including self-innovation in line with social innovation, re-evaluation of its recent past, and complete involvement in the overall struggle for the victory of the new over the old, if possible keeping in mind that both new and old are relative concepts.

In searching for new poetry that reflects the daily concerns and dreams of the common man, we come across some poets who make an effort to achieve something new. Yet in these times of despotism, the echo of poetry is either pursued or in exile or lost.