

The Transformations of Prose Poetry in the Works of Amjad Nasser

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Abstract—This research focuses on the experience of the Jordanian poet Amjad Nasser in writing poetry, its transformations, and its evolution from the form of the free-verse (*Tafi'la*) poem with which he began his poetic journey, to its eventual establishment in the form of prose poetry. This form itself witnessed various transformations and changes until reaching its final shape in his latest collections. Amjad Nasser started by writing free-verse poetry that closely resembled the spirit of prose poetry in terms of form and choice of light metrical rhythms close to prose. This included themes open to life and details, the approach to the simplicity of street language, attention to the everyday, the marginal, and the neglected, leading to conciseness and eliminating unnecessary words and meanings beyond the need of the poem. Therefore, his transition to prose poetry was easy and smooth, a well-considered choice based on knowledge of free-verse poetry and its capabilities, which he utilised in writing prose poetry. His establishment in the form of prose poetry involved continuous practice in development and change. He did not settle for writing in a single form but presented aesthetic, artistic, and thematic additions in each of his collections, placing him at the forefront of prose poetry poets on both Arab and global levels.

Index Terms—free-verse poem, prose poem, poem of details, form, content

I. INTRODUCTION

In this research, there is an attempt to approach the world of prose poetry in Amjad Nasser's work and to trace the transformations and developments his poetry has undergone. It starts with the free-verse poem, which he wrote in his unique and unconventional style from the beginning. This not only demonstrates his distinction and deep talent but also highlights the confident new steps he would take towards writing prose poetry. This initial phase laid a solid foundation for him, deeply informed by the Khalilian metres and the conditions of writing free-verse poetry. It enabled him to transition to prose poetry, benefiting from its various potentials and procedures, and with an awareness of what could be retained in his new poetry and what could be discarded in favour of the new tools specific to his new writing.

Arab influences were evident and clear in Nasser's work, as were Western influences through translation and its effects on his writings. Nevertheless, the impact of the Iraqi free-verse poem was also significant, which he mentioned in his interviews and which drew attention to him from the beginning and since his first collection. However, he quickly transitioned to prose poetry starting with his second collection, *Since Gilad Was Climbing the Mountain* (1981). He wrote prose poems and defended their conditions in his articles and interviews until his death. This poetry did not take a single form, although its concept was clear in the mind of the poet Amjad Nasser, as reflected in his writings.

This is what Amjad Nasser expressed in his articles and interviews. He says: "The problem is that the Arab literary scene has considered the prose poem to be any poetic form liberated from metre and rhyme, regardless of its segmentation or appearance on the page, or its proximity to or distance from prose itself" (Nasser, 2019). He believes that Adonis and Unsi al-Hajj understood the prose poem through Western sources, but they did not formulate a theory about what they did, leaving poets like Al-Maghout and Tawfiq al-Sayegh to write a form they called a prose poem, which is not. Nasser says elsewhere: "This form, namely the broad prose block, is not random, nor is it merely a form; it is, at the same time, content. I mean that it is prose. This form is what determines, at a glance, its belonging to prose. It is a unique literary genre, not a poem branching out from free verse. This is its reality in the poetics from which it was born" (Nasser, 2019).

But the issue lies in understanding the form being written to know and theorise about it properly. Therefore, Nasser also believes that most of what Arab poets have written falls under what is called free verse and not prose poetry because the liberation from metre is not the only condition for writing a prose poem. Hence, according to him, Mohammad al-Maghout writes free verse, and the pioneering of prose poetry, from his perspective, belongs to Unsi al-Hajj and not to al-Maghout (Nasser, 2019). Although, as he often says in his interviews, he was never preoccupied with the form (Nasser, 2012). The form always emerged from the writing itself and followed it, which is why he moved from poetry to the novel, travel literature, and journalistic writing without prior intent, but rather in response to the demands of writing, the drive for creativity, and the anxiety of the creator who does not adhere to a single form, model, or purpose.

As for Amjad Nasser, he published his first collection of poems, *Praise for Another Café*, in 1979. In it, he wrote some free-verse poems alongside prose poems. Subsequent collections moved further away from metered poetry. Most importantly, they possessed unique aesthetic and artistic qualities that placed them among the high-ranking prose poems at both the local and Arab levels.

Amjad Nasser views his collection *Life as an Interrupted Narrative* as central to the literary genre known as prose poetry. This indicates that his previous collections were moving towards prose poetry, but they did not fully belong to it as this collection does, from his perspective. He demonstrates that he continually experimented, tried, and developed his work and poetry, never settling on a single form. This study attempts to trace and explore his progression by dividing his experience into three consecutive and interconnected stages, which also fluctuate in terms of rise, fall, and stability. Although this division is formal and artistic, it encompasses many thematic and intellectual variations. Each stage had to be given a title that marked a turning point in Amjad Nasser's poetic journey and his aesthetic proposals in Arabic prose poetry. These divisions are perhaps made for the sake of study.

The first stage is the beginning phase, with general features that will not be absent in the following stages but will take different artistic and aesthetic forms. The second stage witnesses the rise, development, and maturity of his experience. The third stage can be considered the pinnacle of his experience, reached in *Life as an Interrupted Narrative* and *Adam's Kingdom*, with his book *Second Chance* in between. This encompasses his overall work and what he intended to express through poetry. In the end, poetry is not just a beautiful language, but a language the poet must create to say what could not be said in any other way (Quinn, 2000).

Amjad Nasser wrote prose poetry after an initial phase characterised by free-verse because it best expressed his human stance, primarily as a poem with a rebellious nature. This was during a time when he was leaving his homeland, departing from the place where he was formed and shaped, breaking away from his original place and everything related to it—people and relationships. It also most effectively conveyed his creative, human, and militant stance, as well as his sensitivity to the developments in modern Arabic poetry. This was especially significant since he left Jordan, passed through Beirut, where new poetic experiments were taking place, and eventually reached London, where he had the opportunity to observe the global and international poetic landscape's changes and transformations.

II. DISCUSSION

Amjad Nasser's poetic experience can be divided into three stages:

The first stage: The phase of free verse poetry (the beginnings) and its linguistic, artistic, and expressive influences, as exemplified in his collections: *Praise of Another Café* and *Since Gilad Was Climbing the Mountain*.

The second stage: The phase of prose poetry (the rise) after leaving Beirut, which dominated most of his work and collections, including: *Arrival of Strangers*, *Shepherds of Solitude*, *Pleased is Whoever Saw You*, *The Ascent of Breaths*, and *Whenever He Saw a Sign*.

The third stage: The phase of prose poetry/block poem (the peak), which includes his last three collections: *Life as an Interrupted Narrative*, *Second Chance*, and *Adam's Kingdom*.

These stages are aesthetic turning points, not merely formal ones, because the differences between types of poetry writing are fundamentally aesthetic and artistic. The development of Nasser's poetry can be understood by examining each stage, analysing the poems, ideas, and artistic and aesthetic structures he proposed in a long-term poetic project that continuously ascends without faltering or regressing. Throughout this process, he continued to develop his stylistic and expressive fingerprint, making his language and lexical, intellectual, and artistic vocabulary easily recognizable. These three stages may find justification in the three voices of poetry, which seem like phases that a poem and a poet must go through: "The first voice is the poet talking to himself or to no one. The second voice is the poet addressing an audience, whether large or small. The third voice is when the poet attempts to create a dramatic character who speaks poetry, saying not what he might say personally, but what he can say within the bounds of a single fictional character addressing another fictional character" (Eliot, 1991). In Amjad Nasser's poetry, despite the presence of lyricism throughout his poetic journey, this lyricism sings and expands with the growth of experience and knowledge, reaching a stage of dramatic lyricism as Subhi Hadidi called it (Hadidi, 2019) at its peak in his later collections, especially in his seminal work: *Life as an Interrupted Narrative*. Additionally, there is epic lyricism in his last collection, *Adam's Kingdom*, and beyond.

The first stage:

The initial and fundamental features of Amjad Nasser's poetry can be traced back to the poems of this stage, which evolved and changed over time with the maturation of his experience. We will take the first two collections, *Praise of Another Café* and *Since Gilad Was Climbing the Mountain*, as the emblem of this stage. Although these features were not yet clear, they are significant because they formed the soil from which the trees of the subsequent collections sprouted, shaping the confident poetic persona with clear capabilities, potential, and a well-defined style.

One of the most prominent semiotic features, as evidenced by the titles *Praise of Another Café* and *Since Gilad Was Climbing the Mountain*, is the explicit celebration of place: the café and the mountain. Place is a fundamental pillar in the construction of Amjad Nasser's poetry, but it changes and evolves from one collection to another. Here, it appears not to be static but rather dynamic and perhaps floating. In his collection *Since Gilad Was Climbing the Mountain*, the poet uses the verb "climbing" in its present tense form, emphasising continuity and progress towards the top of the mountain/poetry. Additionally, the form of alteration and difference is evident in the grammatical structure that relies on inversion in *Since Gilad Was Climbing the Mountain*. The poetic ambition at that time is expansive, grand, and unknown, reaching towards the top of the mountain that Gilad is still climbing. Even the dedication of the first collection hints at going far and climbing higher and higher: "To Hind, awaiting the night journey together to the seven mountains" (Nasser, 2008).

As for the title of his other collection, it appears that he is searching for another poetic place. Here, the reference is to both the real place—the café—and the metaphorical one—poetry. He aims to transcend the current, the immediate, the ready, and the existing. It is worth noting the association between the café and poetry, as the café is a place where poets meet, a market where each poet showcases their work. However, Amjad Nasser wants to change the market and aspires to the other, which he will seek in all his collections to establish his own distinctive and unique features and their impact on his personality, experience, and poetry.

This is also evident from the opening of his first collection, *Praise for Another Café*, which he took from a text by Constantine Cavafy, translated by Saadi Youssef. It says:

The roads will always lead you to this city
Do not hope for escape
for there is no ship for you,
nor any road.
And as you have ruined your life here,
in this small corner,
it is a ruin wherever you go. (Nasser, 2008)

The poet is in a state of movement and anxiety, as if the wind is beneath him; neither his spirit nor his body finds rest. This wandering and anxiety resemble a prophecy that casts its shadow on the scenes of life and poetry. Amjad Nasser travelled the world, journeyed through poetry, poems, and experiences, and then returned to be buried in the city he left and rebelled against. However, this city left its unique imprint on his works and writing over four decades. The original city, the mother/place, continued to follow him in everything he wrote, both thematically and aesthetically, in different and varied forms. Consequently, the café "is not seen by the self as an independent geography but as a pretext to penetrate it and pass through it to something else, to a place that longs for other streets, crammed with its space, its wood, and its customers ... a place that is equivalent to the image of the self being sought" (Yahyaoui, 2010).

Amjad Nasser talks about the café as a place for human and experiential connections:

Cafés are more enduring than nails
So what's the harm in that? (Nasser, 2008)
He also says:
And cafés, despite being tents for failed poetry
and subjective criticism
and eternally smoked cigarettes,
are low rocks
for birds coming from the sea
or the desert. (Nasser, 2008)

And the café, which will form part of the title of the first collection, remains active and present until the end of the literary experiment and writings. The café is not just a place; it is his daily, ordinary place, characterised by simplicity, closeness to poetry, poets, and humanity in its various transformations. Amjad Nasser says about it: "*Praise of Another Café* is the title of my first poetry book that praises the world of the café and its manifestations, the fortress of dreams, anger, and rebellion, the oasis of friendship, the banner of the future march on the castles and ramparts of the old world" (Nasser, 2008).

He says, "To this extent, we have had a good opinion of ourselves in cafes, with dreams that only reveal their charm on their wooden tables, except for the disturbance of noise emanating from nearby interruptions to waking dreams and trivial pursuits, except on the throws of dice and the sad songs broadcast by a large radio, immersed in oblivion" (Nasser, 1996). In addition to the café, there are various places and Jordanian cities such as Amman, Zarqa, Ajloun, Ashrafieh, Rakeen, and others.

At the same time, this poet, who seems to write about fixed places, actually chooses a poetry that diverges and breaks away from the prevailing norms, as he did with places as well. From the outset, he decided that his poetry would praise another place, another café. Therefore, these locational terms undergo significant transformations and soar through the prose/poetic verse, which does not settle, does not compromise, and does not accept complicity with the past and present. "Thus, the place is seen as a system of signs through which the poet's imaginative intentions are represented. The textual self transforms into a part of the spatial sign system, becoming indicative of the place's expanses or confines, its lows or highs" (Nasser, 1996).

Amjad Nasser remained outside places, yet at the same time, he yearned for the original place and its values. Rashid Yahyaoui referred to this as "crossings" in Amjad Nasser's writing, relating to his original place and subsequent cities: "It is a kind of penetrating the present place with the values of the past place" (Al-Warari, 2020). There is a conflict within the restless spirit that finds no stability in a place, a body, or a poetic form. Yet, it is the same soul entrenched behind the original place, its values, language, and people, fearing dissolution in the city, cement, and concrete that shaped all the subsequent crossings the poet went through, shaping his new consciousness and influencing his poetic personality. He was called the "Bedouin Sinbad" by Abbas Beydoun (Yahyaoui, 2010), as described in the introduction to his poetic works: "From Al-Mafraq to Beirut to London. From the Bedouin to the mad, insane lover and the impossible. From capitals to the stolen history in Granada. All these are from the impossibilities of the wandering journey, a journey that

moves from dust to dust, from ruggedness to cement forests and street networks. Slipping and sliding, but not just slipping. Al-Mafraq is visible in London. Granada exists in Beirut, and Layla's madman in the bars of Europe and perhaps its brothels. The solid composite moment, a kind of travel in the moment, a type of composite place and time. The journey does not end, but it grows heavier" (Beydoun, 2002).

Amjad Nasser says in one of his interviews about his relationship with places: "Places are more than just a geographical or environmental vessel within which humans move or travel. They are more attached to us than we think, more organic, if you will, from our own limbs. They are like living organisms subject to ageing, erosion, wear and tear, change, and decay just like us exactly" (Beydoun, 2002). The following artistic and aesthetic features can be observed in the collections of this foundational stage and what followed thereafter:

1. **The warm, sensory language, and the blend of Bedouin colloquialism with high classical Arabic:** This mixture initially seems unlikely and heterogeneous between the ruggedness of the desert and the linguistic power on one hand, and the poet's delicacy while maintaining the eloquence of language on the other. It harnesses its linguistic potentials and energies to the fullest extent possible. What is striking is that he will maintain this language despite moving away from the desert, and the influence of Bedouin and pastoral life will remain embedded and evocative in his language. This blend will be a distinctive hallmark of his style and language. "However, rural life occupies the general framework, gaining utmost importance, as it becomes the fundamental theme that guides the text. This theme often does not depart from reverence for nature, nostalgia for the golden age or 'Arcadia,' and praise for seclusion, isolation, and Bedouin life" (Boudiuk, 2013).

He says about Salah Al-Habashneh:

O groom,
You, the beauty of youth,
The adornment of the house,
O moon that never left the edge of generosity,
Nor left the stones.

Now you come laden with snow and radiance. (Nasser, 2008)

The blend of colloquial folklore and formal Arabic in this passage appears as a cohesive mixture, presenting an uplifting image of the relationship between formal Arabic and colloquial language, demonstrating their interchangeability with simplicity, beauty, and without affectation. Amjad Nasser preserved both eloquent Bedouin lexicon and colloquialisms, remaining integral to his authentic Bedouin poetry. Examples of this can be found abundantly in these collections, with recurring vocabulary and their shades and synonyms, alongside the vocabulary of the Bedouin environment dominating his poetic lexicon, imparting it with a distinctive character.

This Bedouin essence will accompany the poem until the end of the experiment: "It carries Bedouinhood as a premise. Like a first meaning before it acquires a second, third, and fourth meaning. To put it another way, the Bedouin is not just a subject but a model. It is thus in the sense that Lorca, Democratic, Yeats, and cosmopolitan Apollinaire had it. That is, it is a foundational ontological model, upon which discourse is based and from which it subsequently takes on second and third dimensions. If we were to add, we could say it is a linguistic model" (Beydoun, 2002).

This is because the lexicon is not just vocabulary; it is a stylistic lexicon that adopts the formal language of Bedouin culture with all its intensity, richness, and warmth. This lexicon entails layers of meaning and the relationship between signifier and signified. This is what led the poet Saadi Youssef, one of Amjad Nasser's poetic fathers and prominent figures, to say about him: "This Bedouin coming from the tribes of Al-Huwaitat, how transparent he is" (Nasser, 2008).

Also, one can point to the linguistic sensuality that Amjad Nasser will develop further in his subsequent collections, giving it additional dimensions.

2. **The creation of personal myths and epic narratives (narratives of the Jordanian place):** The poet must have his own myths, which he takes as examples or masks from the past or present, or he creates them himself, weaving their characters and heroes from his imagination and vision that guide his poetic and aesthetic discourse and presence. In these two collections, myths and epics focused on the local place and the people of this place. Hence, Amjad Nasser named his second collection: *Since Gilad Was Climbing the Mountain*, which he referred to as 'Narratives of the Jordanian Place' in a television interview on a TV program (Habib, 2012), as if it were the poetic history of the place to which he belongs, with roots deeply embedded in history. It is as if he writes the biography of the place through its inhabitants and its epic story, which becomes a legend crafted by the language of Amjad Nasser and his poetry. He says:

These lands are a mixture of sadness,
And intertwining trees,
And youthful layers. (Nasser, 2008).

In these two collections, he narrates the saga of the place / Jordan, through recounting the tales of its old activists, its heroic poets, and its early sons who built this place and established its existence over time:

The Jordanians came from vast wildernesses and the greatest sun,
They entered the embrace of lead, phosphates tunnels,
And the caverns of lightning.
They came from the north and south,

From the Dead Sea and the desert,
 And they constructed the city, contested among
 The contours of maps,
 Livestock traders, and contract signers.
 Philadelphia was prepared to receive the prince.
 Celebration and anthem for them,
 And for us projects of settlement and eroded dams,
 And canned goods,
 And Rome's chariots blazed in the prince's stables. (Nasser, 2008)

And Amjad Nasser belongs to those activists who came from the desert laden with dreams, courage, and determination to build their homeland with their blood, dedicating their souls to it, like Shafei, Nahidh Hattar, Taysir Al-Sabul, and Auda Abu Tayi. He speaks about the martyr Salah Habashneh, nicknamed Shafei, whom he dedicates two poems to.

Shafei remembered that Jordan
 is the fastest horse in the herd
 and that the north pushes in a cart made of willows
 the rifles and clothes of 'Kleib Al-Shareeda'. (Nasser, 2008)

Amjad Nasser invokes the name of the Jordan he knows, establishing its narrative and aligning himself with its symbols: Jordan of Auda Abu Tayi, Kleib Al-Shareeda, Taysir Al-Sabul, Salah Shafei, Nahidh Hattar, and Michel Al-Namri. He resembles them, carrying the pen to fulfil his role, just as some of them wield the pen like him, or the sword, or pen and stance and principle and struggle. He strengthens his presence through poetry and protects and solidifies his identity by narrating the story with his pen:

I am a disappointed boy in the tribe and poetry.
 I came from a camp in the north of the winds,
 And in my language, a tone like a neigh.
 My whip was made of bull skin,
 I pass it over the backs of elegant languages
 And the lowly ones.
 So do not let me name the massacres from the land of 'Gilad'
 Even to my last shirt. (Nasser, 2008)

It is necessary to note the land of Gilad, which is repeated in the second collection and is included in the title of the collection as well. In these two collections, Amjad Nasser is concerned with establishing the myth of the place symbolised by 'Gilad'. Gilad refers to more than one meaning; it is the name of the place that refers to ancient Jordan, which was called the mountainous mass located between the Yarmouk River to the north, the Zarqa River to the south, and the Jordan River to the west. It is Mount Gilad and the region of Gilad. He says:

And do not let me
 Name the massacres from the land of 'Gilad'
 Even to my last shirt,
 I count the violations of my flesh,
 And my mother who the prophecies have left. (Nasser, 1979)

Amjad Nasser is concerned with narrating this spatial myth through the names of its heroes and notable figures from Jordan. After he leaves Jordan and the Arab world, the homeland and the place will take on other linguistic and aesthetic forms, gradually transforming into exile and then into other, more artistic and metaphorical places rather than real and concrete ones. In the following collection, we will find the impact of the place, its narrative, the aesthetics of myth-making, and the writing of the place's story. However, these will gradually change in the subsequent collections, moving increasingly toward metaphor.

3. **The poem of daily details:** In the poetry of Amjad Nasser, this feature is evident and does not contradict the creation of private and public myths, nor the ritualistic and pastoral lyrical language that characterises Amjad Nasser's writing. Rather, this mood altogether forms the special flavour and the distinct stylistic personality of the poet's work, something he does not abandon with experience but rather deepens and solidifies. The first collection, as its title suggests, is concerned with details. Amjad Nasser, the quintessential spatial poet, celebrates and praises the café. Even though he presents the café with its metaphorical and symbolic connotations, as previously mentioned, he talks about specific cafés, their people, their tea, and their details:

And the 'Al-Jazeera' café did not bend in the evening
 on its knees, did not long for another street,
 did not feel constrained by its space,
 or its winter wood,
 or its regular customers.
 And did not improvise a scene of alluring women in coastal cities,
 did not end up narrow like your hands,
 nor spread like blood. (Nasser, 1979)

This feature is likely connected to modern poetry, particularly prose poetry, which shows its characteristics in his first collection, *Praise for Another Café*, and becomes increasingly clear in the second collection, *Since Gilad Was Climbing the Mountain*. It becomes an important stylistic feature in Amjad Nasser's writing, present in all his works. Fakhri Saleh attributes the birth of this poem to Yiannis Ritsos and the translation of his works into Arabic by Saadi Youssef, Rifaat Sallam, and Fakhri Saleh himself. Notably, Amjad Nasser was influenced by Saadi Youssef as well as his translations. "Although we cannot find in the first poetry collection anything that literally matches Ritsos's style in addressing his poetic subject, what stands out the most is his celebration of the poem of details and the subdued tone that distinguishes the new Arab prose poets" (Saleh, 1998).

Amjad Nasser's first poetry collection was not immature, as often happens with poets in their first works, nor was it imitative despite the influences of other poets and their experiences, from which he quickly and intelligently freed himself. Instead, it foreshadowed the strong poetic personality he would develop and achieve. He made the transition from traditional free-verse (taf'ila) based on a solid and conscious foundation, exploring the possibilities of free-verse poetry to then exploit the potentials of prose in writing prose poetry. This laid the groundwork for other forms of free verse, from block poetry to memoirs and novels. This experimentation was not always intentional, as Amjad Nasser himself says, but as a true poet, he had to evolve his experience with each collection he wrote. The aim was to push his experience to the furthest limits of mature artistic construction, enlightened by expertise and experimentation, discovering new ways of thinking and expressing. It is the legitimate restlessness of the poet, open to all the potentials, tools, and visions of language.

The Second Stage (the rise): Leaving Beirut and Maturing of Questions:

1. **The Transformations of Place:** The titles of poetry collections in general may appear as significant keys to understanding the content around which the following collections revolve: *Shepherds of Solitude* is the collection Amjad Nasser wrote after leaving Beirut upon reaching Nicosia. This period, which the poet described in one of his interviews as one he barely remembers anything from, spanned six years of his life. It followed his time in Beirut and preceded his departure to London, where he settled until his passing. Amjad Nasser found himself at two significant junctures in his life, and therefore, this collection may have been closer to a critical and objective review of his previous experience, paving the way for what was to come next, yet simultaneously marking a turning point in artistic and aesthetic terms.

Perhaps, naming this stage a solitude is accurate and perfectly expressive of the collection, as during this time he occupies himself with introspection, his own questions, and his previous experiences. He yearns to fly far and high, yet within it there is a melancholy and lyricism that will remain intrinsic to this rich experience in its transformations and developments. He is concerned with cleansing his voice from the oxide of song, as he puts it, and is mindful of what lies ahead in terms of new writing, even though he may not know the way forward except through willpower, awareness, and a passion for poetry.

And with *Arrival of Strangers*, the Sisyphean journey continues towards what the poet and human dreams of. If the stage of the collection *Shepherds of Solitude* formed a moment of reflection and true solitude between two journeys: in Cyprus between Beirut on one side and London on the other, he does not settle as a human until he finds his lost path and answers to his questions as a naturally anxious poet, with a soul that knows no tranquillity, as his mother once foresaw for him, and he later wrote about this in the collection *Life as an Interrupted Narrative*. Therefore, this collection, *Arrival of Strangers*, seems like the other face of *Shepherds of Solitude*, revealing the existential pain that pervades and dominates his poetry, transcending the exile, displacement, and confusion. He says in the poem bearing his birth date 1955:

Between my comrades, I won exile
 And a lady rewarded me with a sweater her five sons outgrew
 And did not wear.
 And among those who continued to fall from prohibition
 I was granted an island I left between two journeys to blind pirates
 Who were a verse in anger. And I was given cities indebted to Suicides
 With chapters of poppy music. (Sidi, 2017)

On the other hand, these two collections show what Amjad Nasser diligently worked on: establishing a unique prose poem, infused with his Bedouin features, pastoral hymn, and tools enriched by experience, reading, observation, and travel. It will not entirely shed its lyricism but will remain an intrinsic part of his poetry, adding his distinctive touch and poetic spirit. He will focus more on small details, the daily and the marginal, while also cleansing and sifting the poem from its old burdens to embrace a new sensitivity that Amjad Nasser keenly listens to and responds to its demands. Additionally, the poet distances himself more from the first-person pronoun, observing the self from afar through other pronouns like the second person and third person. "It is poetry that refines all senses: sight, hearing, touch, smell, and taste, in a persistent attempt to understand the meaning of existence in this incomprehensible world. In the places of others, the self suffers from suffocating isolation, making the world difficult to interpret, and the relationships between self and world, and things and phenomena, need decoding their elusive secrets" (Nasser, 2008). He says:

The strangers who came from the other banks
 Settled in castles overlooking the postal routes
 He thought of novices lying in wait for messengers in the alleys, forcing them

To confess the mysterious sources of the addresses. (Fakhri & Amjad, 2009)

2. **The Erotic Poem:** In this collection, *Pleased is Whoever Saw You*, the poet transitions to another realm that inevitably emerges from the fixed features of Amjad Nasser's linguistic personality, which seems to have been hinted at and prepared for in his previous collections. This is the warm, erotic language with which he constructs an entire collection in a unique language of love, unparalleled in both modern and ancient Arabic poetry. The language derives its aesthetics from the uniqueness of expression and from elevating the body at the moment when sex merges with love in a warm and transparent language. This makes eroticism an expressive title for love and sex at the moment of high desire, artistically embodied through the tools of imagination and beauty. Among these aesthetic tools are suggestion, gesture, and indication.

With the touch
 I free the ideal from its mould
 And by the light of clear waters
 I reach the source of the scream. (Nasser, 2008).
 He also says:
 Clean
 And surrounded
 And standing
 Olive trees shine in its dew
 Washed by rains and lightning
 It has this scent:
 Cut grass in the morning. (Nasser, 2008)

With this suggestive erotic language, Amjad Nasser writes an entire collection that appears as a single poem divided into sections with titles. However, they all belong to the same linguistic and artistic spirit that dominates the entire collection.

It is worth mentioning that the subject of eroticism necessitated the use of rhetoric with all its metaphorical and imaginative capabilities, including puns, antitheses, paronomasia, metaphors, metonymies, and various forms of similes. However, the theme of love and the flowing language made this rhetoric digestible. In fact, the subject requires and necessitates it to express this passionate and sensual theme with all the warmth and sensuality of the language highlighted and accentuated by the rhetoric.

And this rhetoric, with its tools and capabilities, dominates the entire collection. It may contradict in its details and specifics with the language of prose poetry, which leans towards truth and approaches the simple, the daily, the ordinary, and the direct—a direction that Amjad Nasser's poetry has moved towards. Had it not been for the subject matter in this collection reclaiming that territory with all its components and elements, emphasising the lyricism that will accompany Amjad Nasser's prose poetry until his last experiment, it would have become a distinguishing feature and stylistic hallmark of his poetry. This language is characterised by both lightness and weight simultaneously.

Here, it must be emphasised that we are reading poetry that does not merely explore its subject matter but elevates it. It clearly and ambiguously points to what it intends to signify, revealing and exposing. In this collection, sexuality is inseparable from love and poetry, thus maintaining its sanctity in this elevated poetic and sensual linguistic realm. Carefully selecting its vocabulary, it gathers images and metaphors without exaggeration on one hand and without extravagance on the other. It also approaches Sufi aesthetics, unveiling the pleasures of the body, love, and poetry, even though it returns to rhetoric, which seemed to depart from it in the previous works.

As for the collection *The Ascent of Breaths*, dedicated entirely to Abi Abdullah in his final breaths, it resembles an epic poem about the Arab departure from Andalusia. Here, pronouns vary and change: while the previous collection primarily relied on the feminine second-person pronoun, here it varies between the plural first-person pronoun resembling the preludes of epics that pave the way for the narrative through a prior narration by the chorus and the collective. Then comes the role of the prince in narrating his story, justifying what happened, expressing regret, and then shifting to the masculine and feminine second-person pronouns.

And thus, the text escalates, and the pace of the narrative rises to its peak, then gradually descends and resolves the knot of the story, culminating in the final passage with the speaker's conscience returning to Abi Abdullah Al-Sagheer himself, who reveals the comforting breaths of solace, saying:

Crowned with my lightness,
 My throne in the air,
 Supported by the ardour of breaths.
 My lightness left no trace on the earth
 Nor did it elevate me to you,
 Oh my lightness, lift me up
 Or leave me on a slanting shoulder
 I scatter dust blown on the steps of my childhood among the pomegranates.
 Oh my lightness,
 The stranger arrived

Without yesterday or tomorrow

The stranger arrived on his last breath. (Nasser, 2008)

It is the quiet conclusion that settles on the last breath of an Arab in Andalusia, ending the epic of Abi Abdullah and his presence in the final eras of Arab Andalusian places. Amjad Nasser includes texts that address the departure from Granada like *Elza's Crazy* by Aragon and *The Fall of Granada* by Washington Irving (Nasser, 2008). This means that this collection is based on historical and poetic narratives, creating a new narrative of this Arab departure. The poet chooses the persona of Abi Abdullah to be the hero of this narrative, making the collection an epic poem that commemorates the moment of departure and solidifies it linguistically and artistically in this elevated text.

The epic appears present in this collection, evident in the progression and shift in pronouns, and in containing epic elements of characters, events, conflicts, knots, and resolutions, as well as in the epic narratives of place and characters. While this psyche is not unfamiliar in Amjad Nasser's writing, it matures and completes here, presenting what approaches a comprehensive epic that looks ahead to the Arab experience of the past, with its implications for the contemporary Arab world, which has continued to relive similar experiences. On the other hand, there is the experience of the poet/person Amjad Nasser intersecting with the experience of Prince Abi Abdullah Al-Sagheer in their departure from their original places, showing similarities and intersections in one form or another, as if this epic is the epic of the individual/collective/nation:

"Abu Abdullah Al-Sagheer departed from his palace, resigned and submissive to what his hands had earned through his collaboration with enemies and his neglect of the great legacy of his ancestors' civilization. Similarly, Amjad Nasser departed from his homeland and the wars of ideology and ideologies defeated, leaving behind his past, childhood dreams, and fervour" (Nisreen, 2012). Amjad Nasser says: "I like to imagine that Abu Abdullah Al-Sagheer in *The Ascent of Breaths* is nothing more than a mask for what is current, a mask for the poet himself or those resembling him in the current moment. History itself is not important in this book, as historians write it, but art manifests in the historical objectivity of what is entirely non-historical. I think he tries to discover lost moments, or moments that historians and scholars do not pause at. It is somewhat of a substratum where loss resides, dreams dissipate, and nostalgia coagulates" (Nasser, 2012). He says:

I am Abu Abdullah, known as Al-Sagheer [the little],
 My mother's firstborn,
 Born under the lion's paw,
 My flag is red,
 And my guide is a day inclined towards dusk. (Nasser, 2008)

The Third Stage: The Poem/Block and the Opening of Prose Poem to Prose:

The Block Poem and Narrative Techniques in *Life as an Interrupted Narrative*: Amjad Nasser moves in this collection to an entirely new space, both formally and cognitively. The poem appears in a new textual form, no longer distributed in poetic lines, thus completely breaking its connection with the activating poem. It takes the form of a section/block, consisting of continuous sentences resembling any other prose, and the structure of these sentences in a single paragraph gives the poem its poetic form and presence. There is no whitespace or gap separating these sentences except at the end of each paragraph, where they crystallise sequentially and consecutively (Nasser, 2008).

And this poem tends towards scenic and narrative construction in a dramatic framework that captivates each text within its collection. Each poem in this collection can be divided into a series of similar structures, escalating from a single event or a series of events to a crisis point or climax. Then comes the poetic resolution at the end of the poem, solving the knot artistically, thematically, and aesthetically. As mentioned earlier, this applies almost universally to all the poems in the collection.

On the other hand, Amjad Nasser employs the poem/block form, which differs from prose only in its poetic language construction and the unique aesthetics of this language characteristic of the poet. This form does not make you think about the end of the sentence, its poetic metre, or its internal or external rhythm. It is a sentence that extends and only ends when the meaning is complete, knowing when to be prose and when to be hardened by poetry, thus colouring the entire text with its hue and turning it into a living poem. Amjad Nasser comments on this collection: "I now have more than one book of poetry in the conventional sense of the word. I do not know how long this inclination will last, although I believe it emerged as a result of the evolution of my writing itself and did not fall from the sky. I may not return to writing poetry resembling previous collections like *Shepherds of Solitude* or *Arrival of Strangers*, or even *The Ascent of Breaths*, as if that type of poetry is no longer capable of continuing its forms and language after reaching *Life as an Interrupted Narrative*" (Khadr, 2012). This indicates Amjad Nasser's awareness of the peak he has reached in this distinctive collection in terms of both structure and content. He approached prose to the greatest extent without losing poetry, and going further would mean reaching prose and losing poetry.

As for his next book, *Second Chance*, it is a play of mirrors, as Khalida Saeed says. It intersects with *Life as an Interrupted Narrative* and separates from it. It intersects from the perspective of poetry interrupted by narrative, differing in that poetry and narrative in the first collection intertwine and diverge like life, making the boundaries between them barely distinguishable, while in *Second Chance* they run parallel and do not intersect. Amjad Nasser did this consciously, making the poetry bold and leaving the narrative in fine print. Despite this, they intertwine because they complement each other, even if the poet distinguishes them in print. The prose in fine print moves between past and present, with the poetry

reflecting on the distance between them. The relationship is present and clear, especially since 'Second Chance' was planned in the poet's mind before writing it. He says: "I had a preconceived notion of the work's form, structure, and content, but I discovered during writing that the title did not fit what the writing was tending towards. Thus, I named it *Second Chance*" (Hadidi, 2019).

As for his last book, *Adam's Kingdom*, which he wrote under the weight of illness and a sense of personal and general calamity, it was an attempt to go further in conversing with the past and projecting it onto the living present. Subhi Hadidi called it 'The Epistle of Non-Forgiveness,' saying: "It is the Epistle of Non-Forgiveness that Amjad Nasser sends to our era, about our earthly hell and its victims, our human misery and its makers, and about *Adam's Kingdom*" (Nasser, 2019).

Amjad Nasser wrote about one layer of the afterlife, which is Hell only. Thus, *Adam's Kingdom*, as described and expressed by Nasser, is the most brutal, painful, and torturous. He did not explore the other layers as Dante did before him in the *Divine Comedy* or Al-Ma'arri in the *Epistle of Forgiveness* (Al-Hasani & Nasser, 2021). The poem/collection depicted a parallel hell on earth, which Amjad describes in an intense moment between life and the afterlife:

They cast me with those who met their fate
I was suffocating
And I was not entirely dead
I was almost without breath
I don't know what happened to me.

In this collection, Amjad Nasser masterfully writes his unique prose poetry, continuing to adapt prose to poetry. He uses modern, new vocabulary in this collection, drawn from the fierce Arab battlefields.

And with this new lexicon, he retains the authentic, eloquent, vibrant, and passionate language, expanding it to serve the new subject he has made the focus of the text. Here, personal suffering meets collective suffering, carrying the message of conveying the horrors of war to God. At the same time, the poetic quality neither diminishes nor recedes; instead, it adopts a new form in representation, narrative, and scene-making, capturing the everyday in war and elevating it to the realms of art and poetry.

III. CONCLUSIONS

Throughout his extensive career spanning nearly forty years (1979-2019), Amjad Nasser presented a fully-fledged prose poem. The transformations in his poetry indicate a gradual growth towards maturity. The divisions made in the study are merely formal, intended to describe the artistic and aesthetic features of each stage. The first stage, termed 'the beginnings' by the study, includes his collections: *Praise of Another Café* and *Since Gilad Was Climbing the Mountain*. This stage is characterised by several features that laid the foundation for what followed in terms of language, artistry, aesthetics, and themes. The subsequent stage saw the establishment of Amjad Nasser's prose poetry in the collections: *Arrival of Strangers*, *Pleased is Whoever Saw You*, and *The Ascent of Breaths*. This stage, on a thematic level, witnessed his departure from Beirut passing through Cyprus, and finally arriving in London where he settled and his experience stabilised. Artistically, he shed much of the hesitation between the traditional poem and prose poem that characterised his early work. Additionally, he became aware of establishing his unique poetic style, which acknowledges the Arab achievements in this genre and builds upon them. This led to the third stage, encompassing his collections: *Life as an Interrupted Narrative*, *Second Chance*, and *Adam's Kingdom*. In this mature and conscious stage of development, Amjad Nasser presented his distinctive prose poem, establishing himself as a unique voice with his own imprint and a distinct vision of the new Arabic prose poem.

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