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## An Examination of Impressionist Features in Badr Shakir Al-Sayyab's Poetic Tale "Al-Mumis Al-'Amya'" through the Lens of Susan Ferguson's Theory

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### Abstract

Impressionism, a pivotal artistic movement that originated among painters in the late 19th century, has since permeated the realms of poetry and prose with its distinctive methods and philosophies. Its objective is to capture the essence of objects, evoke mental impressions, and convey the sensory impact of the external world on the writer. Badr Shakir Al-Sayyab (1926-1964), an innovative Iraqi poet of the modern era, crafted poetic narratives that are particularly amenable to contemporary critical scrutiny, notably from the perspective of impressionism. This study aims to identify the principal elements and expressions of impressionism within Al-Sayyab's "Al-Mumis Al-'Amya'" (The Blind Prostitute) and to explore how these elements relate to the narrative's broader themes and implications. Employing Susan Ferguson's theoretical framework, this descriptive-analytical investigation delves into the impressionist components and their manifestations in the aforementioned poetic tale. The research reveals that Al-Sayyab, in line with Ferguson's theory, utilizes ambiguous storytelling techniques, such as elliptical syntax and the metaphorical use of setting, to mirror the characters' thoughts and emotions, thereby critiquing the prevailing issues and crises within Iraqi society. Furthermore, the poet underscores a discourse of religious and revolutionary fervor, articulated through his impressionistic language, as a means to advocate for the liberation of Iraqi society from its challenges.

### Keywords

Impressionism, Poetic Narrative, Al-Mumis Al-'Amya', Susan Ferguson, Badr Shakir Al-Sayyab.

## **Introduction**

In the 20th century, impressionism in narrative literature arose as a trend that favored the articulation of writers' subjective perceptions of external occurrences and phenomena. Pioneering among theorists of narrative literature, Susan Ferguson was instrumental in delineating the artistic paradigms of impressionist narratives. She delineated seven key attributes that distinguish impressionist storytelling, traits that are evident in the majority of contemporary narratives. These encompass "establishing and accentuating the perspective, concentrating on inner experiences, dispensing with conventional filters, employing metaphor, disrupting the chronological order of events, permitting latitude in narrative structure and style, and attending to the craft of writing" (Ferguson, 1994: 219). Motivated by these principles, writers, and poets from Arab and Islamic nations endeavored to harness innovative techniques as vehicles for addressing challenging circumstances and voicing the hardships and issues confronting their societies. As "Moradi (2021: 30) observes Ferguson's seven characteristics in the poetic narratives of poets," several modern Arab poets have gravitated towards this revival-impressionist approach. Notable among them is Badr Shakir al-Sayyab, an Iraqi poet of the modern era, who not only revitalized and innovated within the traditional meters of poetry but also shed light on a multitude of pressing concerns and dilemmas within Iraqi society through novel literary methods. "Al-Mumis Al-'Amya" stands as one of al-Sayyab's most significant poetic narratives, offering a poignant reflection of the harrowing challenges faced by Iraqi society during World War II, including military occupation, foreign colonization, and political oppression.

Significant research has been undertaken on the subject of impressionism or about Badr Shakir al-Sayyab and his story "Al-Mumis Al-'Amya," yet no study has thoroughly explored the impressionist elements within al-Sayyab's literary corpus. Consequently, the current investigation, focusing on a dimension previously neglected by other researchers, intends to scrutinize the impressionist features in the poetic narrative "Al-Mumis Al-'Amya" by Badr Shakir al-Sayyab, employing a descriptive-analytical methodology grounded in Susan Ferguson's theoretical framework.

In pursuit of this objective, the present study endeavors to provide answers to the following inquiries:

- In what manner do the impressionist elements manifest themselves within the poetic narrative "Al-Mumis Al-'Amya" by Badr Shakir al-Sayyab?

- How does the interplay between the impressionist elements and the overarching structure of the poetic narrative "Al-Mumis Al-'Amya" by Badr Shakir al-Sayyab unfold?

## **Methodology**

Impressionism is characterized by the depiction of the impact that a scenario exerts on the critic's intellectual and emotional state, rooted in the concept of influence and impression (Alloush, 1985: 141). Susan Ferguson's theoretical framework has systematically elaborated on this notion, arguing that impressionist elements are the hallmarks of the modern short story, differentiating it from its predecessors. As noted earlier, Ferguson has delineated seven traits of the modern short story, evidently inspired by the impressionist art movement, which she identifies as the essential components of this literary genre. She regards filter as a pivotal aspect in impressionist narratives, maintaining that the story's events are centered around the characters' inner feelings and fantasies, disconnected from outward behavior. Furthermore, the narrative's plot does not adhere to a rational chain of causality, and the recollection of events is linked to the characters' psychological impressions or subconscious currents (refer to Payandeh, 2011: 284-300). Consequently, impressionist stories employ the following techniques to convey a post-modernist filter, diverging from conventional approaches: metaphorical filter, metaphorical setting, metaphorical imagery, and temporal dislocation within the narrative. This article seeks to investigate the filter in the poetic narrative "Al-Mumis Al-'Amya" and uncover the expressions of impressionism in poetic instances extracted from the work by Badr Shakir al-Sayyab.

## **Findings**

In discussing the metaphorical significance of the setting, it is evident that the portrayals of diverse locations within the narrative—such as the village, the city, the brothel, and Iraq itself—fulfill a metaphorical purpose that reinforces the story's central theme, the viewpoint of the protagonist, and the emotional trajectory of the tale. The young girl, who once enjoyed a comfortable life in a small village with her father, finds herself without a place there after his death

and becomes a drifter in the city and its brothels. The depictions of these locales are imbued with the colors and fragrances that reflect the characters' emotional states. Indeed, these settings serve as metaphors for the challenges and hardships that have emerged among the various social strata of Iraqi society due to ignorance and unawareness, leading to a worsening of conditions, displacement, and the oppression of the Iraqi populace.

A distinctive aspect of Badr Shakir al-Sayyab's impressionist narratives is the skillful incorporation of olfactory and gustatory sensory details, alongside the use of color and light. As readers navigate these descriptions, they not only engage with the interplay of various lights and colors but also perceive the scents of the elements within the imagery. Within these impressionist vignettes, readers can also encounter sensory impressions such as the concealed crimson hue by the fragrance of flowers, the radiant smile of a shop in the light, the blinding effect of brightness, and the glimmer of wine. These elements, encompassing fusion, contrast, the dance of light and shadow, and diverse descriptive techniques, contribute to the mosaic of impressionist imagery in the poetic narrative "Al-Mumis Al-'Amya" by Badr Shakir al-Sayyab. This imagery imbues the work with a modernist quality, articulating the poet's and the societal emotions and insights that arise from the new way of life and the engagement with the subconscious mind's stream, capturing fleeting and momentary interpretations.

## **Conclusion**

Badr Shakir al-Sayyab utilized the technique of subconscious stream to convey his instantaneous and fleeting impressions with an artistic flair that depicted the grim realities of Iraq during World War II in an impressionist style. These direct interpretations, shaped by a Marxist viewpoint, functioned as a means to illuminate the social challenges and predicaments of the disadvantaged class within Iraqi society. Literary devices such as metaphorical filter, the metaphorical use of setting, impressionist imagery, temporal dislocation, and narrative structure are among the overarching characteristics that imbue the poetic narrative "Al-Mumis Al-'Amya" with the vivid hues and evocative scents of impressionism. Concurrently, the characters within the story assume a symbolic role, with each one embodying the issues confronting contemporary Iraqi society.

In a similar vein, the metaphorical settings play a pivotal role in conveying social and political perspectives in a transient and impressionist fashion, reflective of Iraq's political unrest and military subjugation. Places like the brothel, the city, and the village not only fulfill a metaphorical purpose but also harmonize with the story's broader narrative. Moreover, the employment of impressionist imagery, drawn from colors and the juxtapositions of light and shadow, plays a vital role in evoking social themes within the mind of the all-knowing narrator and the characters. The chaos and disorientation that emerge from the free associations within the narrative, relying on the principle of associative resemblance to invoke political and social themes and ideas, are inherently sufficient to infuse the current story with impressionist attributes. These attributes have been manifested through the use of reverse chronological order or future-oriented storytelling, orbiting around the axis of existence.

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