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The Poetics of *Nahḍah* Multilingualism: Recovering the Lost Russian Poetry of Mikhail Naimy

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Abstract

Drawing on archival research, this article introduces several Russian poems by the Arabic *mahjar* poet and writer Mikhail Naimy (Mikhā'il Nu'aymah) (1889-1988) for the first time to scholarship. By examining the influence of Russian literature on Naimy's literary output, we shed light on the role of multilingualism in generating literary identities and in shaping literary form. Naimy's Russian poetry, we argue, furthers our understanding of the *nahḍah* as a multilingual movement that synthesized influences from many different languages. We also show how this multilingual orientation served as a bridge between the *nahḍah* and *mahjar* literature, by helping Arab writers craft a poetics of Arabic modernism in the diaspora. Alongside documenting an important archival discovery, this research contributes to our understanding of the temporality of Arabic modernism while illuminating its geographically and linguistically diverse substance.

Keywords

Arabic modernism – Arabic literature – Russian literature – Russian Romanticism – Arab-American literature – translation – émigré literature – multilingualism

The *naḥḍah*, a literary movement that introduced modern currents into Arabic literature and advocated a new relationship among Arabic writers to their classical past, is increasingly studied in a comparative context, as one of a series “non-Western projects of cultural and political modernity in sites such as China, Russia, Greece, and Bengal, where questions of culture, language, and social reform eventually evolved into anti-imperial or anti-colonial nationalism.”¹ Also known as the “Arab Renaissance,” this period in Arabic literary history is widely regarded as a watershed moment during which Arab writers developed new literary genres in order to better express the increasing cosmopolitanism of Arabic literary culture. Yet, amid the ongoing epistemic reorientation that increasingly places *naḥḍah* literature in a multilingual global context, this movement’s multilingualism dimensions remain under-explored. As Samah Selim presciently noted in her critical assessment of the state-of-the-field within Arabic literary studies, Arabic literature’s “material circuits of production and dissemination” require “urgent attention precisely in order to articulate new questions of method and theory that emerge from local—national or regional—contexts rather than as an appendage of contemporary Euro-American epistemologies and intellectual histories.”² Engaging with Arabic literature on its own terms requires rethinking the circuits of its transnational migration, across languages, cultures, continents, and contexts.

This article takes up scholars’ call for a new way of thinking about Arabic literary history by engaging with a major if understudied writer from the late *naḥḍah*—Mikhail Naimy [Mikhā’īl Nu’aymah]³ also belonged to a group of writers from the Levant who arrived in the Americas in the first decades of the twentieth century in search of better lives. Collectively, this group of writers constituted a literary movement called the *mahjar*.⁴ We aim to further our understanding of the *naḥḍah* as a multilingual movement that synthesized influences from Russian, French, English, and many other languages, while also reshaping the Arabic literary canon. We also show how this multilingual

1 Lital Levy, “The *Nahḍa* and the *Haskala*: A Comparative Reading of ‘Revival’ and ‘Reform,’” *Middle Eastern Literatures* 16.3 (2013): 302.

2 Samah Selim, “Toward a New Literary History,” *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 43.4 (2011): 735.

3 For the writers of the *mahjar*, we follow the spellings they adopted in their English writings, with the exception of ‘*Arīḍah*, who did not publish in English. For Naimy’s preferred spelling, see Nadeem N. Naimy, *Mikhail Naimy; an Introduction* (Beirut: American University of Beirut. Oriental Series 47), 88 n. 3.

4 For the relation between the *mahjar* writers and the *naḥḍah*, see Fawwaz Traboulsi, “Ahmad Faris al-Shidyāq (1804-87): The Quest for Another Modernity,” in *Arabic Thought beyond the Liberal Age: Towards an Intellectual History of the Nahda*, eds. Jens Hanssen and Max Weiss (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2016), 175-186. Traboulsi refers to *mahjar* writers such as Gibran as belonging to the late *nahda* (p. 179); we follow that usage here.

orientation served as a bridge between the *nahḍah* and *mahjar* literature, by helping Arab writers craft a poetics of Arabic modernism in the diaspora. Naimy, on whom we focus on here, was formed within three starkly different cultural contexts: first, rural Lebanon, where he was born and passed his childhood; second, as a student in a Russian missionary school in Palestine and subsequently tsarist Russia; and, third, as an émigré member of the Arab diaspora in North America and the *mahjar* school of writers. In introducing Naimy's early Russian poetry to scholarship, this article opens a chapter in the history of Arabic literary modernism that has yet to be written: on the role played by the memory of Russian on Arabic writers in the North American diaspora.

Our article is organized into five parts. First, we consider Naimy's early literary trajectory. His Russian education took him from Lebanon to Mandate Palestine and finally to Poltava at the southern edge of the Russian empire (now Ukraine), following which he migrated to the US, joined an influential circle of Arab-American writers, and turned from writing in Russian to writing in Arabic. We then turn to "Frozen River," the most famous among Naimy's poems that exist in Russian and Arabic versions, and the only one known to scholarship prior to this article. Having examined Naimy's already established bilingual writings, the third section expands the Arabic modernist canon by introducing our recent discovery in the archives of A. Haddad and N. Haddad Collection in the Middle East, Africa, and Asia Division of the Widener Library (hereafter the Haddad Collection). This discovery consists of three of Naimy's Russian poems, which were long believed to have been lost.⁵ We document how the discovery of these lost poems led to a reconceptualization of our approach to the study of Naimy and his circle. In the fourth section, we look at the impact of Naimy's Russian writings on his Arabic literary production, in particular on his innovations within Arabic poetics. We conclude by reflecting on what this new material tells us about the role of multilingualism in shaping Arabic modernism, and in particular what it shows about how different linguistic identities can coexist within a single author.

To a great extent, modern Arabic literature was founded outside the Arab world by writers who had been fully or partly educated in a language other

5 Our previous publications on Naimy's Russian influences (Maria L. Swanson, "I slew my love with my own hand': On Tolstoy's Influence on Mikhail Naimy and the Similarity between Their Moral Concerns," *Al-'Arabiyya: Journal of the American Association of Teachers of Arabic* 51 (2018): 69-87 and Rebecca Ruth Gould, "Naimy and the Russian Literary Canon," *Reshaping the Landscapes of Arab Thought: The Legacies of Kahlil Gibran, Ameen Rihani & Mikhail Naimy*, ed. May A. Rihani and Michael W. Dravis [Gibran Chair, University of Maryland], 125-136) were published without the benefit of the archival discovery described in these pages.

than Arabic.⁶ Naimy and his New York literary circle are a case in point. In 1920, Naimy's friend and collaborator Nasīb 'Arīḏah (1887-1946), along with his friend Kahlil Gibran [Jibrān Khalīl Jibrān] (1883-1931), founded *al-Rābiṭah al-qalamiyyah* (literally "Pen Association," hereafter al-Rābiṭah). This literary association soon became the one of the most influential institutions of the *mahjar*. Along with the *naḥḏah* movement that inspired it, al-Rābiṭah helped to establish modern Arabic as a literature of international stature. Al-Rābiṭah's members left a deep impression on modern Arabic poetry.⁷ They infused the Arabic literary tradition with new currents, topics, rhythms, and genres. At the same time, they revived the classical poetry of Abū Nuwās, al-Mutanabbī, Shawqī, Ḥāfez, among others.⁸ Outside the classical Arabic canon, they were also impacted by the Persian *rubā'iyāt* of Umar Khayyām and by multilingual (Mozarabic) Andalusian poetry, from which they took the strophic *muwashshah* style.⁹

Naimy's first literary writings were in Russian, and they were imitations of Russian poems.¹⁰ The period of his writing in Russian lasted several years, until his migration to the US, after which Naimy permanently switched from Russian to Arabic for his literary work. In 1910, at the age of twenty-one, Naimy composed a poem in Russian entitled "Mértvaia reka" (literally "Dead River"; here referred to as "Frozen River," following the title Naimy used in his Arabic

6 On this point, see Elisabetta Benigni "Translating Machiavelli in Egypt: *The Prince* and the Shaping of a New Political Vocabulary in the Nineteenth-Century Arab Mediterranean," *Machiavelli, Islam and the East: Reorienting the Foundations of Modern*, ed. Lucio Biasiori and Giuseppe Marcocci (New York: Springer, 2017), 211.

7 Shmuel Moreh, *Modern Arabic Poetry 1800-1970: The Development of its Forms and Themes Under the Influence of Western Literature* (Leiden: Brill, 1976).

8 Nādirah Sarrāj, *Nasīb 'Arīḏah. Al-shā'ir, al-kātib, al-ṣuḥufiī Al-dirāsah al-muqārīnah* (Cairo: Dār al-Ma'ārif, 1970), 262-264.

9 Nādirah Sarrāj, *Dirāsāt fi shu'arā' al-mahjar: shu'arā' al-rābiṭah al-qalamiyyah* (Cairo: Dār al-Ma'ārif, 1964), 260, 262 (on Umar Khayyām), 151-2 (on the *muwashshah* style).

10 As discussed below, the poems are stored in the "Papers of Nasīb 'Arīḏah, 1887-1946" section of the "N. Arida, A. Haddad and N. Haddad Collection," in the Widener Library of Harvard University, box two. The Haddad collection was donated to Harvard in 2015 by the Haddad family. The donors' forebearers, 'Abdel-Masīḥ Ḥaddād (1888-1963) and Nadrah Ḥaddād (1881-1950), were members of al-Rābiṭah who collaborated with Naimy and 'Arīḏah. The collection consists of ten boxes that include approximately one hundred notebooks, two postcard albums, various writings, personal papers and correspondence, as well as photographs, transcripts of the radio program "Voice of America," newspaper clippings, an issue of a handwritten newsletter "Akkord" issued on September 28, 1909, and 'Arīḏah's obituary. Excerpts from Naimy's poems "Rybaki" ("Fishermen") (April 24, 1909), "K stoletiiu godovshchiny Nikolaia Vasil'evicha Gogolia" ("To the One Hundred Anniversary from the Birth of Nikolai Vasil'evich Gogol") (March 31, 1909) and "Son" ("Dream") (February 1, 1909) have been taken from his notebook included in this collection.

translation).¹¹ About a decade later Naimy published *al-Ghirbāl* (The Sieve, 1923), a collection of literary critical essays in which he called for radical changes to Arabic poetics by engaging with world literature in translation. On the basis of this work, Naimy has been called “the most articulate and consistent of the Arab voices calling for literary change in the early part of the 20th century.”¹²

Naimy’s thirst for new experiences made him eager to try his pen in all literary genres. The complete collection of his works—in Arabic, English, and Russian—extends across six thousand pages, and includes poetry, short stories, biography, autobiography, plays, novels, essays, aphorisms, travelogues, press interviews, and “a book of prayers.”¹³ By way of introducing these and other crucial texts in the Russian chapter *nahḍah* multilingualism, this article examines the Russian writings of Naimy, including unpublished works that we attribute to him here for the first time, and which, prior to our research, were wrongly attributed to Nasīb ‘Arīḍah. While researchers have previously noted in passing that Naimy wrote “Frozen River” in Russian, scholarly analysis has been limited to the poem’s Arabic version. Like the rest of his Russian poems, Naimy’s Russian version of “Frozen River” has been conspicuously absent from critical discussions of his oeuvre.

Amid Arabic Studies’ global turn, the influence of world literature on the writings of the members of al-Rābiṭah is increasingly recognized.¹⁴ Yet

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- 11 Nadeem N. Naimy, *Mikhā’īl Nu’aymah: ṭarīq al-dhāt ilā al-dhāt* (Beirut: al-Ṭab’ah al-kāthūlikiyah, 1978), 14.
- 12 Gregory Bell, “Mikhā’īl Nu’aymah.” *Essays in Arabic Literary Biography: 1850-1950*, ed. Roger Allen et al (Wiesbaden: Otto Harrassowitz Verlag, 2009), 257.
- 13 C. Nijland, *Mikhā’īl Nu’aymah: Promoter of the Arabic Literary Revival* (Istanbul: Nederland Historisch-Archaeologisch Institute Istanbul, 1975), 29.
- 14 See for example Sarrāj, *Nasīb ‘Arīḍah*; Shafī al-Sayyid, *Mikha’īl Nu’aymah: fī al-naqd wa-ittijāhuhi fī al-‘adab* (Cairo: ‘Ālam-u al-Kutub, 1972); Muḥammad Mustafā Badawī, *Modern Arabic Literature* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992); *idem*, “Commitment in Contemporary Arabic Literature.” In Boullata, Issa J., *Critical Perspectives on Modern Arabic Literature* (Washington, DC: Three Continents Press, 1980), 23-47; Issa J. Boullata, “Mikhail Naimy: Poet of Meditative Vision,” *Journal of Arabic Literature* 24.2 (1993): 173-184; Hussein Dabbagh, *Mikhail Naimy: Some Aspects of His Thought as Revealed in His Writings*, Occasional Papers Series 19 (Durham, UK: U of Durham, Centre for Middle Eastern and Islamic Studies, 1983); Jūzīf Naṣr, *Nasīb ‘Arīḍah: shā’ir al-ṭarīq* (Mu’assasat ‘Izz manḥajuhu al-Dīn li-al-Ṭibā’ah wa-al-Nashr, 1997); Wail S. Hassan, “Gibran in Brazil.” *Gibran in the 21st Century: Papers of the 3rd International Conference*, eds. Henri Zoghail and May Rihani (Beirut: Lebanese American University, 2018), 65-84; Nadīm Nu’aymah, *al-Fann wa-al-hayāh, dirāsāt naqdīyah fī al-‘adab al-‘arabīyah al-ḥadīth* (Beirut: Dār al-Nahār, 1973); *idem*, *Mikhail Naimy; Introduction* (Beirut: American U of Beirut, 1967), Oriental Series 47; *idem*, *The Lebanese Prophets of New York* (Beirut, Lebanon: American U of Beirut, 1985).

scholarship to date has focused more on European and American literary influences than on Russian. Although the traces of Russian influence are substantial, such sources mention Russian literature only passing. As we increasingly appreciate how composing poetry in Russian provided a way for Naimy to adapt Arabic modernism to his vision of world literature, the time has come to examine Naimy's Russian writings, and his translations of his Russian work into Arabic, from a multilingual point of view and in light of recent archival discoveries.

Alongside our examination of the influence of Russian literature on Naimy, the pages that follow discuss the phenomenon of multilingual literary production. While the Russian and the Arabic Naimy emerge from the same person, the nuances of each authorial persona reflect the limits and possibilities of each literary language. "Only through self-destruction," literary theorist Suga insists, "can a language attain a new life."¹⁵ The case of Naimy suggests a different and more hybrid model for literary creation, wherein multiple languages co-exist in an author at the same time. Rather than positing a sharp opposition between the author's Russian and Arabic selves, we show how the different linguistic facets of Naimy's literary persona complimented each other. Naimy's unique multilingualism, we argue, is that of an author who assigned different roles to different languages. Far from being a source of conflict, as was the case with many bilingual authors in European exile, Naimy's hybrid multilingualism enriched his literary production, and contributed to the cosmopolitan understanding of cultural difference that permeates his entire oeuvre.¹⁶

A Multilingual Education

Naimy's encounter with Russian literature began with his attendance at a school managed by the Russian Imperial Orthodox Palestinian Society (hereafter RIOPS) in the Levant. RIOPS could not compete in terms of size or income with St. Joseph University in Beirut, run by the Jesuits or with the American University in Beirut, which was supervised by the Protestants. Most of its schools were located in the poorer areas of Syria, Lebanon, and Palestine, where some of the population practiced Eastern Orthodox Christianity. RIOPS

15 Keijirō Suga, "Translation, Exiphony, Omniphony." In Tawda, Yoko. *Voices from Everywhere* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2007) 21-35, 27.

16 For accounts of literary bilingualism that offer a more binary understanding of this condition, see Elizabeth Klosty Beaujour, *Alien Tongues: Bilingual Russian Writers of the 'first' Emigration* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1989).

schools aimed “to give at least an elementary education to every Orthodox Arab child.”¹⁷ RIOPS had an additional objective of preparing young Arab men to work as teachers; there was a constant need for teachers who would work in the Middle East.¹⁸

Like any missionary establishment, RIOPS exerted its ideological influence in a geopolitical environment in which rival colonizers competed with each other. Because Russian policy in the Levant differed from that pursued by western European and American missions, RIOPS complicates the traditional focus of postcolonial critiques; the organization also supported the local population in its struggle against Ottoman rule and helped to preserve Arabic cultural heritage from destruction.¹⁹

RIOPS schools were known as among the best in the region. They were characterized by academic rigor, progressive pedagogical principles, democratic admissions policies, and good boarding conditions. As Russian Orientalist Ignatii Krachkovskii remarked of these schools, “it is not for nothing that many modern writers of the older generation, not only translators from Russian but also authors in their own right who spoke to the entire Arab world, had passed through the schools of the Palestinian Society.”²⁰ In order to counter Catholic and Protestant proselytism, European languages were rarely included in the educational program of the Orthodox schools.²¹ This policy, whereby Russian schools gave a prominent place to both Russian and Arabic languages and literatures, contributed to the emergence of an Arab intelligentsia across the Levant that was well-versed in Russian literature.

Naimy’s Russian education exerted a deep influence on him. As he wrote in his memoirs, recalling this formative period many decades later:

I felt like someone who is drilling a big well, but does not have all the necessary equipment [...]. My admiration for Russian literature kept growing. My grief about the inferiority of Arabic literature when compared

17 Derek Hopwood, *The Russian Presence in Syria and Palestine 1843-1914. Church and Politics in the Near East* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1969).

18 K. N. Iuzbashan. “Palestinskoe obshchestvo. Stranitsy istorii,” *Istoricheskii Vestnik* No. 6-7 (2000). Available online at <http://krotov.info/history/19/57/yuzbo1.html> (2 November 2012).

19 Irina Gudozhnik, “Missionerstvo i kul’turnyi pod’em na arabskom vostokey XIX-nachale XX veka.” (“Missionary and the Cultural Rise at the Arabic East in the 19th-early 20 centuries”) Diss. Moscow State University, 1993, 64; Spencer Dan Scoville, “The Agency of the Translator: Khalil Beydas’ Literary Translations.” Diss. U of Michigan, 2012, 22.

20 I. Iu. Krachkovskii *Among Arabic Manuscripts*, trans. Tatiana Minorsky (Leiden: Brill, 2007), 67.

21 Gudozhnik, “Missionerstvo i kul’turnyi pod’em,” 143.

to Russian literature [also increased]. The shameful poverty of [Arabic] literature has its roots in [our] lives. The litterateurs are not able to separate the peel from the pith. [But] while I was very angry with our writers and poets, who were famous at that time, I also wished to become one of them [...]. I wished I could write like these Russians.²²

Elsewhere in his memoirs, Naimy wrote that what he read in Russian stimulated in him “a passionate desire to deepen my knowledge of Russian language and literature.”²³

At the Theological Orthodox seminary in Poltava in Ukraine (then part of the Russian empire), where Naimy was able to continue his studies for about five years (1906-1911), he completely devoted himself to his passion for literature. He read the Russian poets Alexander Pushkin, Ivan Nikitin, Nikolai Nekrasov, and the Ukrainian poet Taras Shevchenko (whose “Zapovit” [Commandment] he later translated into Arabic). About two decades later, Naimy recalled in a letter to Krachkovskii: “While at the seminary, I quickly immersed myself in Russian literature ... In front of me a truly new world was opening up, full of wonders. I read voraciously. There was hardly a Russian writer, poet or philosopher whom I did not read exhaustively.”²⁴ In addition to Russian prose, Naimy was fond of Russian poetry, especially Mikhail Lermontov, about whom he recalls: “Only the Lord knows how many impressions this poet left on me.”²⁵

In shock, Naimy came to perceive his homeland as a cultural backwater. He noted in his journal from these years:

I was unable to do anything other than to compare our literature and Russian literature. O Lord, what a huge chasm separates us from the West! In what darkest darkness we live! How firm is the peel that we have used to cover life! [...] How poor are you, my country, that even world stars like Tolstoi have not yet burned through your nights' darkness.²⁶

Naimy came of age as an intellectual during the *naḥḍah*. Modern Arabic literature was just beginning to take shape. As he grew older and as Arabic literature developed, he acquired a more favorable impression of its potential.

22 Mikhā'il Nu'aymah, “‘Ab‘ad min wa-min wāshintūn,” *Mikhā'il Nu'aymah. Al-majmū'ah al-kāmilah* (Beirut: Dār al-‘Ilm lil-malāyīn, 1979), 6: 203.

23 Mikhā'il Nu'aymah, *Sab'ūn: hikāyat 'umr. 1889-1909. Al-marḥalah al 'ulā. 1889-1911* (Beirut: Dār Bayrūt, 1962), 142.

24 I. Iu. Krachkovskii, “Mikhail Nuayme,” *Izbrannye sochineniia*, ed. V. A. Gordlevskii (Moskva, Izd-vo Akademii nauk SSSR, 1955-1960), 3: 223-229.

25 Nu'aymah, *Sab'ūn: hikāyat 'umr. 1889-1909. Al-marḥalah al 'ulā. 1889-1911*, 181.

26 Nu'aymah, *Sab'ūn: hikāyat 'umr. 1889-1909. Al-marḥalah al 'ulā. 1889-1911*, 231.

Also in Poltava, Naimy began writing poetry. One of these poems, “Pokhorony liubvi” (“Funerals for Love”), likely written in Russian, has been lost.²⁷ We can guess that it was dedicated to the themes of love and disappointment, which permeated the decadent poetry that was in fashion during Naimy’s residence in Ukraine. Given that the lost poem carries the same title and covers the same topics as the verse of Russian-Jewish poet Semën Nadson, whom Naimy described while studying in Poltava as “deeply sensitive [*latîf al-khass*],” it is reasonable to assume that this convergence is no accident.²⁸

Naimy favored Russian as his language of composition due to his education as well as to his Christian background. The Russian and Lebanese Eastern Orthodox Christian churches followed a similar liturgy. This liturgy laid the metrical foundations of Russian poetry and also contributed to the formation of modern Arabic poetry.²⁹ RIOPS schools deepened the ability of their graduates to appreciate these rhythms. The lyricism of the Christian liturgical style influenced Arab Christian poets and helped them develop a modern poetic style, creating new spaces for a meditative poetics.

Naimy’s early Russian writings manifest a multilingual version of what Harold Bloom famously called the “anxiety of influence” to describe the psychological condition of British Romantic poets. As a Romantic poet from a later age, Naimy describes his life in Poltava in terms that suggest a desire to compete with Russians in everything. In his autobiographical writing from this period, the Arab youth who had been raised in a small northern Lebanese village has discovered a new world of theatres, dancing, and singing. In Poltava, Naimy was struck by the contrast between the solitude and loneliness of his life in Lebanon, where he had no one to speak to about world literature, painting, music, and theatre.³⁰ Most importantly, however, it was in Poltava that Naimy discovered poetry, and began to craft for himself an identity as a Russian-language poet.

During his last years of studying at the Theological Seminary in Poltava, Naimy compiled a list of books in his library (figure 1). This list, composed in Russian, includes the literary works of five Russian prose writers (Ivan Gorbunov, Aleksandr Sheller-Mikhailov, Leo Tolstoy, Vladimir Korolenko, and Leonid Andreev), a collection of literary criticism by the influential Vissarion Belinskii, a collection of Taras Shevchenko’s poems, several reference books, a self-study guide for learning French, and several volumes of Heinrich Heine’s

27 Nu’aymah, *Sab’ûn: hikāyat ‘umr. 1889-1909. Al-marḥalah al’ulā. 1889-1911*, 176, 183, 240.

28 Nu’aymah, *Sab’ûn: hikāyat ‘umr. 1889-1909. Al-marḥalah al’ulā. 1889-1911*, 194.

29 See, respectively, Barry P. Scherr, *Russian Poetry: Meter, Rhythm, and Rhyme* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1986) Shmuel Moreh, “Poetry in Prose (*al-Shi’r al-Manthūr*) in Modern Arabic Literature,” *Middle Eastern Studies* 4.4 (1968): 330-360.

30 Nu’aymah, *Sab’ûn: hikāyat ‘umr. 1889-1909. Al-marḥalah al’ulā. 1889-1911*, 173, 175, 178.

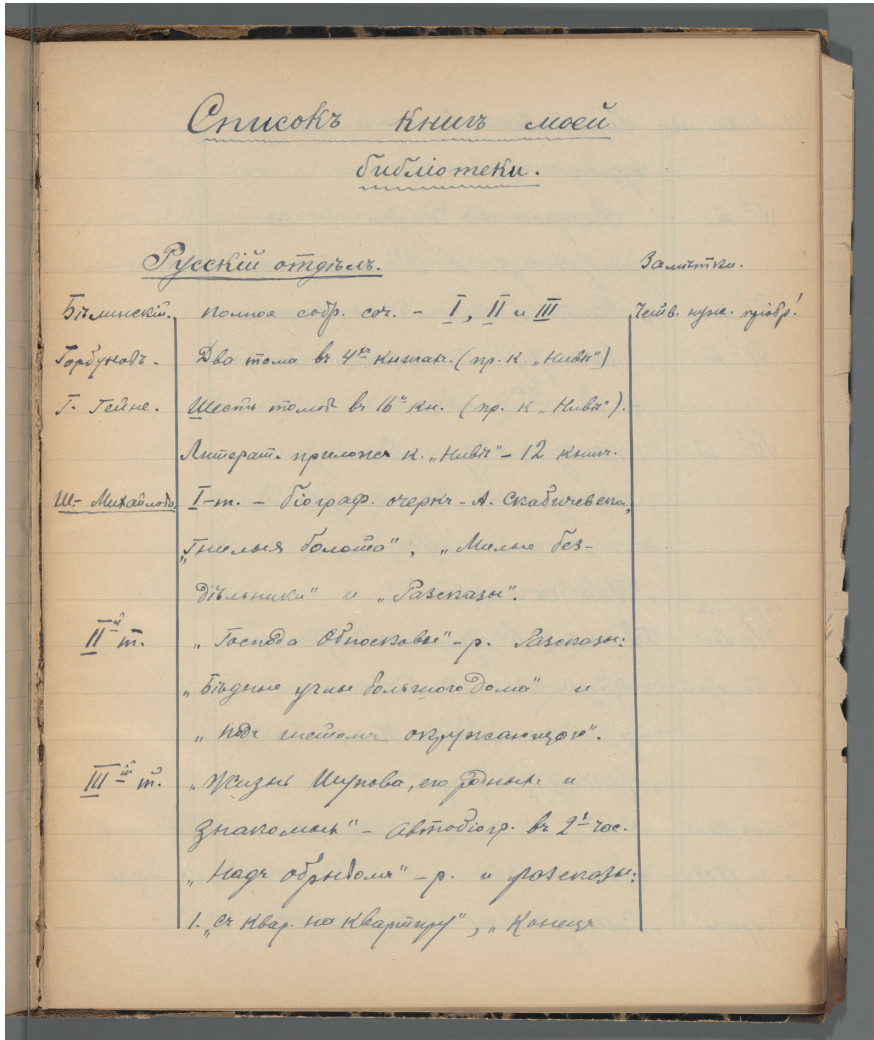


FIGURE 1 The first page of Naimy's book list, entitled "List of Books in My Library." Taken from Naimy's notebook (Haddad collection, box two)

poetry that had been translated into Russian. This list also includes a book about the philosophy of literature by E. A. Solov'ev (Andreevich), which had just been published in 1909. This means that Naimy did not only study Russian classical works, but was also reading recent work in Russian.³¹ This list also contains some issues of *Niva*, a literary periodical that was extremely popular

31 E. A. Solov'ev-Andreevich, *Opyt filosofii russkoi literatury* [The Experience of the Philosophy of the Russian Literature] (St. Petersburg: Izd-vo tovarishchestva 'Znanie', 1909).

in Russia at that time and an important source for Russian as well as world literature translated into Russian, and *Iasnaia Poliana*, a magazine edited by Leo Tolstoi and named after his estate.

Three years after Naimy's arrival in the US, his collaborator 'Arīḍah established *al-Funūn*, an Arabic literary magazine that was published in New York from 1913 to 1918. In his memoirs, Naimy stated that those involved in the journal were heavily influenced by Russian literature. He noted that, in addition to himself, 'Arīḍah and Kahlil Gibran were the most cultured and widely read of the group.³² While Gibran did not know Russian, he read Russian literature translated into English.

Further proof of the interest of the editors of *al-Funūn* and members of al-Rābiṭah in Russian literature is the fact about that about one-third of the contents of its initial issues were devoted to translations of Russian authors. Some issues of *al-Funūn* contained photographs of Tolstoy (issue 1.3, June 1913, figure 2) prints of Russian paintings (issue 2.2, July 1916: 7) and even of Russian periodicals (issue 2.2, July 1916: 54).

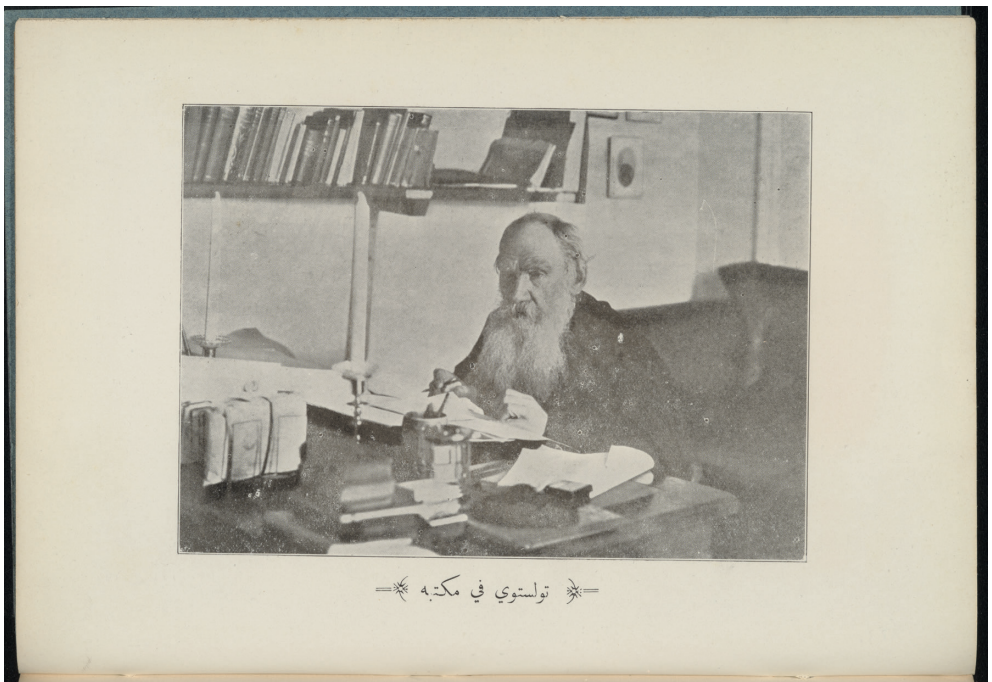


FIGURE 2 Photo of Tolstoy in *al-Funūn*, issue 1.3 (June 1913) labelled "Tolstoy in his office"

32 Mīkha'il Nu'aymah, *Jibrān Khalīl Jibrān: ḥayātuh, mawtuh, 'adabuh, fannuh* (Beirut: Dār ṣāder, 1934), 201-202.

Because Russian formed a part of Naimy's formal education, writing in this language came naturally to him, and became a first step in his literary career. Writing in Russian enabled Naimy to develop a uniquely multilingual orientation that was also part of his everyday life. Above all, Naimy's knowledge of Russian assisted him in writing poetry, and helped him to develop the aesthetic that would later shape his contribution to Arabic literary modernism.

It was only after Naimy arrived in the United States in 1911 that he began to appreciate Arabic literature and to devote himself to reading it intensively. The uneasy life that he led in "little Syria"—as the Lower Manhattan neighbourhood where many Arab emigrant writers settled was called—prompted him to gradually switch to Arabic as the medium for his writing. Soon after he moved to New York and became associated with al-Rābiṭah, his friend and collaborator 'Ariḍah advised him to immerse himself more deeply in Arabic literary criticism. "All that you have written is wonderful," he told Naimy while advising him to broaden his reading further, "I just have one request: read more Arabic writers' works, starting from al-Yāzījī, to our contemporaries. Probably, you will become for us like Belinskii for Russians and Sainte-Beuve for the French."³³ Naimy followed his friends' advice, and extended the mandate of the *naḥḍah* to encompass the *mahjar* literature being created in his new cultural environment.

Naimy's rapid transition to writing in Arabic was stimulated by his desire to craft new poetry under the influence of the *naḥḍah*, and to engage, in the medium of Arabic, with the latest developments in European thought. *Naḥḍah* writers aimed to develop new philosophical, political, social, and ethical orientations by reviving, critiquing, and transforming classical Arabic. They constantly searched for new literary forms that helped them craft a new aesthetic suited to contemporary realities. Naimy described their aims in *al-Ghirbāl*:

Only a person who will search in the deep corners of his soul can be a king of literature [*sulṭān al-'adab*]. [...] Literature, to the extent that it is literature, is nothing but a messenger between a writer's and someone else's soul. And a writer who deserves to be called a writer is the one who shapes his messages according to his messages from his heart [...] The only thing that enabled al-Rābiṭah to come close to the Arabic reading audience, aside from its faith, was that it considered Arabic literature a messenger, and not a gallery of linguistic fashions or a tinsel display.³⁴

33 Mikha'il Nu'aymah, *Sab'ūn: ḥikāyat 'umr. 1889-1909. Al-marḥalah al-thānīyah. 1911-1932* (Beirut: Dār Bayrūt, 1964), 31.

34 Mikha'il Nu'aymah, "Miḥwar al-adab," *al-Ghirbāl* (Doha: Wizārat al-Thaqāfah wa-al-Funūn wa-al-Turāth, Dawlat Qaṭar, 2012), 53-58, 57.

In this same work, Naimy also reflected on the relationship between Arabic and European literary influence: "Today we return to Europe that was our pupil yesterday, discovering in it the examples that we consider to be key to our "literary rebirth" [*nahdatunā al-adabiyah*]." Naimy then adds that "life and literature are twins" in the sense that "literature leans on life, and life reclines on literature." "Literature," he concludes, "is as broad as a life, has secrets as deep as life."³⁵ For Naimy, the movement of language and ideas is reciprocal: life and literature reflect each other.

The new cultural environment provided by the *mahjar* movement made possible new forms of literary production among Syro-Lebanese intellectuals. In the Americas, they found more advanced printing facilities and benefited from the absence of Ottoman censors. Freed from the constraints of the institutions tasked with safeguarding the classical Arabic poetic tradition, they were exposed to a range of new and up to that point foreign literary and philosophical influences, many of which were translated into Arabic in the pages of *al-Funūn*.³⁶

The political, social, and cultural crisis in Levant, combined with his first years in North America, where he endured economic hardship during the Great Depression, must have prompted Naimy to think back to the best period in his life. He recollected his study in imperial Russia, at a time when he was not forced to fight for his daily bread. Later, in *Beyond Moscow and Washington*, Naimy would return describe Moscow, the centre of world communism, and compare East and West. The capitalist culture of North America was in many respects alien to him.³⁷ Although his rural Lebanese childhood identity had been supplanted by his Russian education, life in Little Syria awoke in him a desire to reinvent himself through his artistic work, in Arabic once again.

Having offered a brief outline of Naimy's early literary trajectory and the shaping of his identity as a poet in Russian, the remainder of this article focuses on a series of Russian poems by Naimy that remain either poorly understood and underexamined in their original Russian versions, or which are have yet to be examined because they were believed lost until they were recently discovered by us during the course of our archival research.

35 Mikha'il Nu'aymah, "Al-Riwāyah al-tamthīliyyah al-jadīdah," *al-Ghīrbāl*, 59-66, 60.

36 A large number of these issues have been digitized and made available on the website of the Nasib Aridah Organization at <http://www.al-funun.org/index.html>.

37 Mikha'il Nu'aymah, *'Ab'ad min mūskū wa-min wāshīntun* (Beirut: Dār al-'Ilm li al-Malāyīn, 1979), 165-166, 262-264; *Sab'ūn: ḥikāyat 'umr. 1889-1909. Al-marḥalah al-thānīyah. 1911-1932*, 22-25.

Russian Folklore and Arabic Lyricism: “Frozen River”

Among Naimy’s Russian poems, only “Frozen River” (Table 1), has attracted substantial scholarly attention. In 1917, six years after his immigration to America, Naimy translated this poem into Arabic and published it in *al-Funūn* (Vol. 2, No 9, 783-786). As his first published poem—which ironically appeared in the year 1917, coinciding with the official end of the imperial Russia of his childhood and the beginning of the Soviet Union—the publication of the Arabic version of this poem marks an important moment in Naimy’s biography. Arguably, 1917 was the year in which Naimy ceased to be a Russian poet and became an Arabic writer.

Although 1917 seems to have marked the end of his writing career *in* Russian, it did not mark the end of his fascination with Russian literature. Naimy devoted several chapters of a much later collection of essays, *Fī al-ghirbāl al-jadīd* (In the New Sieve), published in 1972, nearly fifty years after the original *al-Ghirbāl*, to Russian writers and poets. In addition, Naimy spoke of Russian literature with great love and appreciation in numerous later interviews. Russian scholar A. A. Dolinina recalled her meeting with Naimy during her visit to Lebanon in the end of 1960s. She was pleased to find out that Naimy remembered Russian poems that he had learned during the Russian period of his long life, and enjoyed reciting poems by nineteenth-century poet Ivan Nikitin until the end of his life.³⁸

Much of Naimy’s work during the later phases of his literary production is preoccupied with spiritual contemplation and meditation, which also developed under the impact of the Russian literature.³⁹ Naimy’s quietist philosophy—developed in response to what he considered to be the intertwinement of good and evil (*al-khayr wa al-sharr*)—bears traces of Tolstoy’s thought. As Naimy wrote in his memoirs: “Tolstoy the seeker after the truth of his soul and of the world around him fascinated me more than [Tolstoy] the author of *War and Peace* and *Anna Karenina*.”⁴⁰ In any case, it is clear that Russian prose mattered most to Naimy during the final phase of his literary work, and his attachment to Russian poetry dates back to his earliest period.

Table 1 contains an excerpt from Naimy’s “Frozen River” in both the Russian and Arabic versions. The Russian version in column one is accompanied by our English translation in column two. Naimy’s Arabic translation, incorporating

38 Anna Arkad'evna Dolinina, afterword to *Moi semdesiat' let* [My Seventy Years], by Mikhail Naimy (Moscow: Nauka-Glavnaia redaktsiia vostochnoi literatury, 1980), 222-36, 236.

39 Bell, “Theosophy, Romanticism and Love in the Poetry of Mikhail Naimy,” 32.

40 Nu'aymah *Sab'ūn: hikāyat 'umr: 1889-1909. Al-marḥalah al 'ulā. 1889-1911*, 269.

numerous changes to the poem, is reproduced in column three. This self-translation first appeared in *al-Funūn* under the title “Al-nahr al-mutajammid” (“Frozen River”), and was later included in the only collection of his poems, *Hams al-jufūn* (“The Whisper of the Eye’s Lids”), which appeared in 1945 in Beirut.⁴¹ Naimy recalls in his memoirs that he received many compliments from writers, poets and intellectuals immediately after the first publication of the Arabic version of the poem, describing it as a new beginning for Arabic poetry.⁴² Although this work was seen to mark a new era in Arabic poetics, it was rooted in two classical separate classical traditions: Russian and Arabic. Naimy claimed that he had used the second most common meter in Arabic poetics, called *kāmil*⁴³ which maintained the rhythm for only two *bayts*. He called his style “European [*al-faranjī*].”⁴⁴ Naimy does not spell out what he means by “European style,” but it seems likely that he was referring to his use of the heroic couplet, a traditional form of English poetry which follows the AABCC rhyme scheme used in the Arabic version of this poem.

Khouri’s English translation of the Arabic version is reproduced in column four.⁴⁵ Naimy stated in his diary that he had decided to change the ending of the poem when he translated it into Arabic. As we can see from the resulting text, the shift to Arabic also entailed an inward turn. As Naimy explained, his decision was motivated by the sense that he was living in a world where the beauty of the human spirit had faded, and hatred, malice, and greed had replaced mercy, loyalty, and justice.⁴⁶ Naimy’s Arabic version brings the poem into closer alignment with his pre-theosophical Arabic poetry concerning the universal condition of mankind.⁴⁷ Table 1 presents part one of “Frozen River,” which in its full version is divided into five parts in Russian and three parts in Arabic, and shows the many changes Naimy made to the poem’s length, structure, and lexicon during the process of self-translation. Naimy’s nephew, Nadeem Naimy,⁴⁸ includes a photographic copy of the Russian version of this poem in his study of his uncle’s literary oeuvre. The

41 Its first part is four lines shorter comparing to the one of its first publication.

42 Nu’aymah, *Sab’ūn: hikāyat ‘umr. 1889-1909. Al-marḥalah al-thānīyah. 1911-1932*, 69.

43 Bell notes that “Al-nahr al-mutajammid” follows the *kāmil* metrical scheme, but in “dimetric variation” (“Theosophy, Romanticism and Love in the Poetry of Mikhail Naimy,” 74-5, n. 41).

44 Nu’aymah, *Sab’ūn: hikāyat ‘umr. 1889-1909. Al-marḥalah al-thānīyah. 1911-1932*, 70.

45 Mounah Abdallah Khouri, *Studies in Contemporary Arabic Poetry and Criticism* (Bethesda, MD: Jahan Book Company, 1987).

46 Nu’aymah, *Sab’ūn: hikāyat ‘umr. 1889-1909. Al-marḥalah al-ūlā. 1889-1911*, 257.

47 Bell, “Theosophy, Romanticism and Love in the Poetry of Mikhail Naimy,” 172-3.

48 Naimy, *Mikhā’il Nu’aymah: tariq al-dhāt ilā al-dhāt*, 16-17.

TABLE 1 Part One of “Frozen River” in Russian, Arabic, and English

	“Mértvaia reka,” written by Naimy in Russian (1910)	“Frozen River,” translated from Naimy’s Russian (2020)	“Al-nahr al-mutajammid” Naimy’s translation into Arabic (1945)	“Al-nahr al-mutajammid,” Trans. Khouri (1987)
	Part One			
1	Что ты спишь, Сула́, Точно мертвая.	Why do you sleep, Sulá, as if dead,	يا نهر هل نضبت مياهلك فانقطعت عن الخرير؟	O river! Have your waters run so dry that I no longer hear your murmuring?
2	Бвлымъ саваномъ Вся покрытая?	covered all over by a white shroud?	أم قد هرمت وخار عزمك فانثنت عن المسير؟	Or have you grown old? Has your will grown weak? Have you ceased your flowing?
3	Не стремишься вдаль Посреди степей	You do not flow ahead through the steppe.	بالأمس كنت مرّماً بين الحدائق والزهور	Yesterday you used to sing among the fields and flowers;
4	Не шумишь волной Серебристою?	Don’t your silvery waves make a sound?	نُتلو على الدنيا وما فيها أحاديث الدهور	You recited to the world and all therein the tales of the ages.
5	Иль тебе, Сула, Надоело течь?	Or are you, Sula, tired of flowing?	بالأمس كنت تسير لا تخشى الموانع في الطريق	Yesterday you flowed along fearing no obstacles on your way
6	Или квъмъ то ты Заколдована?	Or has someone enchanted you?	واليوم قد مبطت عليك سكينة اللحد العميق	While today, the silence of deep grave has fallen over you.
7	Иль зима пришла И мороз лихой	Or did the winter come and the dashing frost	بالأمس كنت إذا أتيتك باكياً سليتني	Yesterday when I came to you weeping, you cheered my spirits;
8	По рукамъ-ногамъ Заковал тебя?	chain your hands and feet?	واليوم صرت إذا أتيتك ضاحكاً أبكيتني	Whereas today, when I came to you laughing, you led me to weep.
9	Берега твои Пригорюнились	Your shores started grieving	بالأمس كنت إذا سمعت تنهدي وتجعني	Yesterday when you heard my sighing and lamenting, you wept,

TABLE 1 Part One of "Frozen River" in Russian, Arabic, and English (*cont.*)

	"Mértvaia reka," written by Naimy in Russian (1910)	"Frozen River," translated from Naimy's Russian (2020)	"Al-nahr al-mutajammid" Naimy's translation into Arabic (1945)	"Al-nahr al-mutajammid," Trans. Khouri (1987)
10	И застыли въ нихъ Воды чистыя.	and your clean waters froze up in them.	تبكي، وها أبكي أنا وحددي، ولا تبكي معني	Whereas here am I, weeping along, but you do not join in my tears.
11	Не плыветъ по нимъ На челнеъ своемъ	Does not on his boat sail,	ما هذه الاكفان؟ ام هذه القيود من جليد	What are these shrouds? Or are they bonds of ice
12	Удалой рыбакъ Съ свътью- неводомъ.	a courageous fisherman with a seine fishing net?	قد كَلِّتَكَ وَذَلَّتْكَ بِهَا يَدُ الْبَرْدِ الشَّدِيدِ؟	With which the harsh hand of the cold has chained and humbled you.
13	Надъ тобой висятъ Вербы грустныя,	The sad willows stand above you,	ها حولك الصنفاص لا ورق عليه ولاجمال	Here the willows, beside you, with nei- ther leaves nor beauty
14	Опустивши внизъ Вътви голыя.	hanging their bare branches down.	يَجْثُوكِنِيأً كَمَا مَرَّتْ بِهِ رِيحُ الشَّمَالِ	Kneel in grief every time the North Wind passes through them.
15	Не поетъ на нихъ Соловей-шалунъ,	The impish nightingale does not sing into them.	والحورُ يندُبُ فوق رأسك نائراً أغصانه	And poplar spreading its branches mourns above your head;
16	Не ласкаютъ ихъ Ветры южныя.	The South winds do not caress them.	لا يسرحُ الحسونُ فيه مرددا الحانه	The goldfinches do not range there repeating their melodies.
17	Только вороновъ Стая черная,	Only a black flock of crows	تأتيه اسرابٌ من الغربان تتعق في القضا	Flocks of crows came cawing through the vast expanse,
18	Прилетая къ нимъ, Грустно каркаетъ.	sadly caws when flying to them.	فكأنها ترثي شباباً من حياتك قد مضى	As though they were lamenting your life's youth which has passed.
19	И сдается мне. Что поютъ они	and it seems to me that they sing	وكأنها بنعياً عند صباح وفي المساء	With their croaking at morn and at eve, as though

TABLE 1 Part One of “Frozen River” in Russian, Arabic, and English (*cont.*)

	“Mërtvaia reka,” written by Naimy in Russian (1910)	“Frozen River,” translated from Naimy’s Russian (2020)	“Al-nahr al-mutajammid” Naimy’s translation into Arabic (1945)	“Al-nahr al-mutajammid,” Trans. Khouri (1987)
20	Тебе пѣсенки Погребальныя.	to you the songs of burial,	جَوْقٌ يَشِيعُ جِسْمَكَ الصَّافِي إِلَى دَارِ الْبَقَاءِ	They were choir escorting your pure body to the next world.
21	Что унылый хоръ Этих вороновъ	that the sad chorus of these ravens		
22	Отпевает все Твою молодость.	is singing a burial song to your youth.		

image reproduced by Nadeem Naimy is taken from the first issue of the journal *Aurora*, the handwritten clandestine journal of the Poltavian seminary students. Naimy signed this poem as N.-Rêveur, a French sobriquet meaning “Dreamer.” Naimy’s keenness to stage an encounter between his Russian and his Arabic literary persona is indicated by his decision to translate this poem a full seven years after its original composition.

The Russian version of “Frozen River” is addressed to the Sula River, a tributary of the Dnieper, which flows through the Poltava region of Ukraine. In the poem, Naimy compares Mother Russia to a stagnant frozen river (vv. 1-2) and includes many references to peasant life (vv. 12; 19-20). He appears to foretell an imminent revolution. In the Arabic version, Naimy removed the allusions to Russia, including to workers and peasants. The name of the River Sula was replaced with the more generic “river,” in order to facilitate the poem’s new affiliation with an Arabic literary landscape.

As documented by Fanous, Naimy was attentive to the role of Lebanese folk culture in reviving modern Arabic literature.⁴⁹ The parallel influence of Russian folk culture can be documented for Naimy’s earlier Russian poetry, alongside the impact of poets such as Ivan Nikitin (1824-1861), whom Naimy called a tender (*raqīq*) poet.⁵⁰ It is possible that the very idea of writing a diary

49 M. W. S. Fanous, “Aspects of the Lebanese contribution to modern Arabic literary criticism.” Diss. U of Oxford, 1980, 315.

50 Mikha’il Nu’aymah, *Sab’ün: hikāyat ‘umr. 1889-1909. Al-marḥalah al’ ūlā. 1889-1911*, 179.

might have been taken by Naimy from Nikitin's *Dnevnik seminarista* (Journal of a Seminararian), since Naimy claimed that this work impacted him profoundly.⁵¹ Like Ivan Kol'tsov (1809-1842) and Ivan Surikov (1841-1880), Nikitin wrote in the so-called peasant style and crafted verses that resembled Russian folk songs. Naimy's immersion in the cultural life of Poltava, his fondness for Russian and Ukrainian folklore, and his desire to write like "these Russians,"⁵² further indicate Naimy's connections with Russian folk songs.

The differences between "Al-nahr al-mutajammid," and the traditional Arabic ode (*qaṣīda*) have been noted by many researchers, as well as by the author-translator himself. Naimy recorded in his memoirs that his friend Gibran once told him that the Arabic version of his poem "gently stirred with its melody and complexion [*lawn*]."⁵³ Reading it, he felt, just as Naimy did, that they "had begun to walk in the funeral procession of the traditional ode [*al-qaṣīdah al-taqlīdiyyah*] with its monorhyme, monometer, and its hackneyed themes and images, the pleasant appearance of which had faded from being repeated so often."⁵⁴

Although it was composed in the classical *kāmil* meter, with its admixture of European poetics—"a rhyme," as Naimy wrote, "only for each couplet in the European style"—he conceived of this poem as a counterweight to the classical Arabic tradition. Boullata points out that Naimy uses accessible and colloquial diction in his Arabic verse, which combines a meditative mood with a whispering tone.⁵⁵ This tone makes the poem an effective vehicle for conveying the poet's experience. Badawi has noted that the language of Naimy's poetry, specifically its "artful simplicity and directness," achieved great intensity of feeling without loud rhetorical effects.⁵⁶ Sarrāj notes that Naimy skilfully achieved complete unity for all parts of this poem and converted them into a special melody, in which its shadows and colours achieve total harmony.⁵⁷

Several years after translating "Frozen River" and composing several other poems, such as "Akh" ("My Brother"), also composed in 1917, in which he achieved an utmost emotional effect while avoiding sentimentality, Naimy articulated his aesthetic credo in *al-Ghirbāl*:

51 Ibid.

52 Nu'aymah, "Ab'ad min mūskū wa wāshintun," 6: 203.

53 Nu'aymah, *Sab'ūn: ḥikāyat 'umr. 1889-1909. Al-marḥalah al-thāniyah. 1911-1932*, 69.

54 Nu'aymah, *Sab'ūn: ḥikāyat 'umr. 1889-1909. Al-marḥalah al-thāniyah. 1911-1932*, 70.

55 Boullata, "Mikhail Naimy: Poet of Meditative Vision," 174-75.

56 Badawī, Muḥammad Muṣṭafā. *Modern Arabic Literature* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 100.

57 Sarrāj, *Dirāsāt*, 262.

Every reader has his scale to measure poetry and poets. They do not use my measuring scale, but I shall also not exchange it for theirs [...] The first thing that I look for in all that is called poetry is a breath of life. I mean by this [...] not the reflection inside me of what the organized words contain that I am reading. If something like this breath is present, then it is a clear sign of poetry. Otherwise, I should consider it inanimate. In addition, its masterful rhymes, embellished words, and flickering rhythms will not deceive me.⁵⁸

The Russian “Frozen River” has a prosaic rhythm and a preference for short stanzas structured by refrains, exclamations, and alliteration. Its lyrical and compact style is typical of folk songs, with their special concentration on emotions and descriptions of nature. The stanzas convey a wistful mood of poetic tenderness and gentleness that reveals the speaker’s inmost feelings. Naimy recreated these features in his Arabic version. The contrasts and parallels of “Frozen River,” including its theme of the changing seasons as cyclical patterns, are typical of Russian folksongs, and became significant in Naimy’s later poetry.⁵⁹ The Russian version also contains colloquialisms typical of Russian folklore, such as *staia voronov* (“flock of ravens”), *pesenki pogrebal’nyia* (burial songs), *Rus’ matushka* (“Mother Russia”), and *krasno solnyshko* (“the red sun”).⁶⁰ Some of Naimy’s translations of these phrases in the Arabic version of the poem are literal transpositions of the Russian.

Both the Russian and Arabic versions contain elements characteristic of Russian folklore, including detailed descriptions of seasons, declarations of the victory of an evil force, fantastic elements (the river is cursed, and the banks are sad), and dramatic imagery (the frozen river in Part One and the warm spring in Part Two) presented in simple language. While he cleaved closely in his self-translation to the Russian version, Naimy also adapted some aspects of the Russian for an Arabic audience. For example, he replaced the Russian term *step’* (steppe) with “gardens and flowers [*al-ḥadā’iq wa-al-zuhūr*].” Here and elsewhere, Naimy’s Arabic rendering does not match the Russian. Instead, it closely approximates what would be expected in an Arabic text. Such

58 Nu’aymah, “Arwāḥ al-ḥā’irah” *al-Ghībāl*, 155.

59 Nu’aymah, *Hams al-jufūn* (Beirut: Nūfel, 2004), 7, 33-7, 48, 9.

60 Burial songs are ritual songs that are a part of the East Slavic funeral rituals. As noted in V. V. Varganova, *Russkie narodnye pesni* (Moscow: Pravda, 1988), these songs belong to the one of the oldest folklore genres and tell about the earthly life of the deceased and his new heavenly life. As for the ravens mentioned by Naimy, Slavic folklore regards them as embodiments of death. It was believed that the croaking of a raven brought misfortune and even death.

substitutions reveal the co-existence of two languages in Naimy's literary consciousness, and the convergence between them that may have been facilitated by his exposure to a third language: English.

Naimy fully discovered his latent Romantic voice as a poet, which had been forged first in Russian, when he translated his Russian poetry into Arabic. In the Arabic version of "Frozen River," Naimy uses the idiom of a Russian folk song to convey a lyric voice. Khalifa is in a minority when he argues that the heartbroken tone of a depressed lonely poet "sounds over-romantic" in Arabic.⁶¹ Naimy's poetry is distinguished by its simplicity and directness in both Russian and Arabic. But it was in Arabic—with the help of his training in Russian—that he most influentially adapted classical poetic genres to modern aesthetic norms.

Rediscovering Naimy's Lost Russian Poems

Beyond "Frozen River," Naimy's poetic output in Russian has, as of this writing, been unknown to scholarship. This section, based on our recent archival discoveries, will change that. We tell here the story of a discovery that occurred mid-way through drafting the present work. Initially, in assigning authorship for the poems discussed below, we followed the labelling adopted by Harvard, which catalogued 'Ariḍah as their author. However, the more we worked on these materials, the clearer it became that the Russian poems attributed to 'Ariḍah were in fact authored by Naimy. Below we explain how we arrived at this conclusion.

What particularly attracted our attention was the notebook attributed to 'Ariḍah stored in the collection. It consists of one hundred and seventy pages, almost all of which are filled with text inscribed in black ink, using pre-revolutionary orthography and a calligraphic style typical of that period. The notebook contains all the poems described in this article, as well as the list of books and journals in his library noted above. The notebook also includes three copies of a single photograph placed between the pages, presumably by Naimy: four men and a woman sit in front of a short log fence. In the background is a landscape typical of the Poltava region: bushes, trees and meadows. The men and women are dressed according to early twentieth-century Russian fashions. Two bearded men are dressed in cassocks, one man wears a student

61 Abdulwahab Khalifa, "Translation Studies: An Analytical Study of the Translation of Nuaymah's Poem 'The Frozen River,'" *International Journal of Sciences, Basic and Applied Research* 14.2 (2014): 374.

uniform, and a woman wears a white blouse and a dark skirt. Her long hair that is pulled back and pinned. All four are in their twenties or thirties. Their clothing suggests that they belong to the middle class. It is most likely that this is the family of his friend Il'ia Vasil'evich Maïlov (he is in the middle of the picture dressed in student's uniform) from the town of Romen where Naimy spent some time in 1910.

A few inconsistencies in the text, as well as with related sources, raised to questions concerning the attribution to 'Arīḏah. A number of statements found in Naimy's memoirs,⁶² alongside other corroborating evidence, led us to conclude that a number of poems attributed to 'Arīḏah in Haddad Collection were in fact by Naimy. For example, Naimy states in the Russian version of his memoirs: "The country will soon celebrate the anniversary—the 100th anniversary of Gogol's birth. And our school will celebrate this anniversary. Gogol is a son of the Ukraine; he is from the Poltava province. I wrote a poem about this."⁶³ The Haddad collection contains an ode entitled "K stoletiu godovshchiny rozhdenia Nikolaia Vasl'evicha Gogolia" ("To the One Hundred Anniversary of Nikolai Vasil'evich Gogol"), which is (incorrectly) attributed to 'Arīḏah. In the same section of his memoirs, Naimy states: "I began to write a long poem. Its title is 'Fishermen [Ṣayyādū al-'asmāk].'" I want to portray the life of poor people in it in comparison with the lives of those who live in luxury and grandeur, and expose the vices of modern civilization."⁶⁴ Since a poem in the 'Arīḏah papers (Haddad Collection) bears the same title as Naimy's Russian poem "Fishermen [Rybaki]," and 'Arīḏah never mentions having written such a poem, we have concluded that the poem in the Haddad collection is authored by Naimy. Naimy believed that the poems which we have determined to have been authored by him were lost during his journey to America.⁶⁵ Yet as we have learned, these poems were in fact preserved, albeit in an unexpected location and under the wrong label.

The material circumstances of the poems further corroborate our argument for Naimy's authorship. All of the literary works included in the notebook from the Haddad collection are labelled *seminaria* ("the seminary") by the author. And it was Naimy, not 'Arīḏah, who studied at the Russian Orthodox Seminary in Poltava from 1905 to 1909. Naimy frequently mentions his Russian writings in his memoirs. Only after arriving in America did he start to compose poetry in Arabic. During his Poltavan period, his understanding of Arabic poetry was

62 Nu'aymah, *Sab'ūn: hikāyat 'umr. 1889-1909. Al-marḥalah al-'ulā. 1889-1911*, 239-240.

63 Nu'aymah, *Sab'ūn: hikāyat 'umr. 1889-1909. Al-marḥalah al-'ulā. 1889-1911*, 139.

64 Nu'aymah, *Sab'ūn: hikāyat 'umr. 1889-1909. Al-marḥalah al-'ulā. 1889-1911*, 240.

65 Naimy, *Mikhā'īl Nu'aymah: ṭariq al-dhāt ilā al-dhāt*, 34.

on the same level of his knowledge of English and French poetry. In addition to the evidence from the Russian version of Naimy's memoirs and the material circumstances of the manuscripts, which clearly indicate his authorship of the Russian poems, there is the fact that no source has indicated that 'Arīḍah has authored poetry in Russian. Although he lived in the United States for over four decades, from 1905 to his death in 1946, 'Arīḍah's published writing is limited to Arabic. Previous scholars who worked in the Haddad collection lacked adequate familiarity with Russian to piece together the disjointed evidence for Naimy's authorship of these poems. Even for scholars who read Russian, the archaic pre-revolutionary Russian orthography of the notebooks made this evidence easy to ignore.

How to explain, not only the misattribution, which has persisted for decades, but also Naimy's mistaken belief that his work was lost?⁶⁶ Since Naimy and 'Arīḍah worked closely together on the journal *al-Fanun*, they may have shared a mutual archive. It is also possible that they planned at some point to translate Naimy's Russian poems into English, or into Arabic, given that 'Arīḍah had distinguished himself as a translator of Russian poetry into Arabic early in his literary career. Whatever the explanation for the unexpected appearance of Naimy's lost Russian poems in his friend's archive, this discovery calls for a reassessment of Naimy's relationship to Russian literature, of his position within the Russian literary canon, and of Russian literature's contribution to Arabic literary modernism.⁶⁷ In the remainder of this article, we examine the three newly discovered poems, before reflecting on how their discovery affects our understanding of Naimy's literary trajectory.

The Poet as Social Critic and Prophet: Naimy's Russian Poems

While studying at Poltava, Naimy copied into the above-described seminary notebook a series of poems he called *Pervyi lepet 1908-1909* ("The First Babble," 1908-1909).

The longest poem in this collection is a ballad of over forty pages called "Rybaki" ("Fishermen"). The poem bears the traces of Russian poet Vasilii Zhukovskii, who is credited with introducing Romanticism into Russian literature, as well as Mikhail Lermontov, whose verse his collaborator 'Arīḍah translated into

66 See Bishārah Sab'ali, *Mikhā'il Nu'aymah yuhaddithunī* (Beirut: B. al-Sab'ali, 1998), 34.

67 We notified Michael Hopper (Head, Middle Eastern Division, Harvard University Library), following our discovery that Naimy was the author of the Russian poems misattributed to 'Arīḍah. He informed us that the metadata would be corrected.

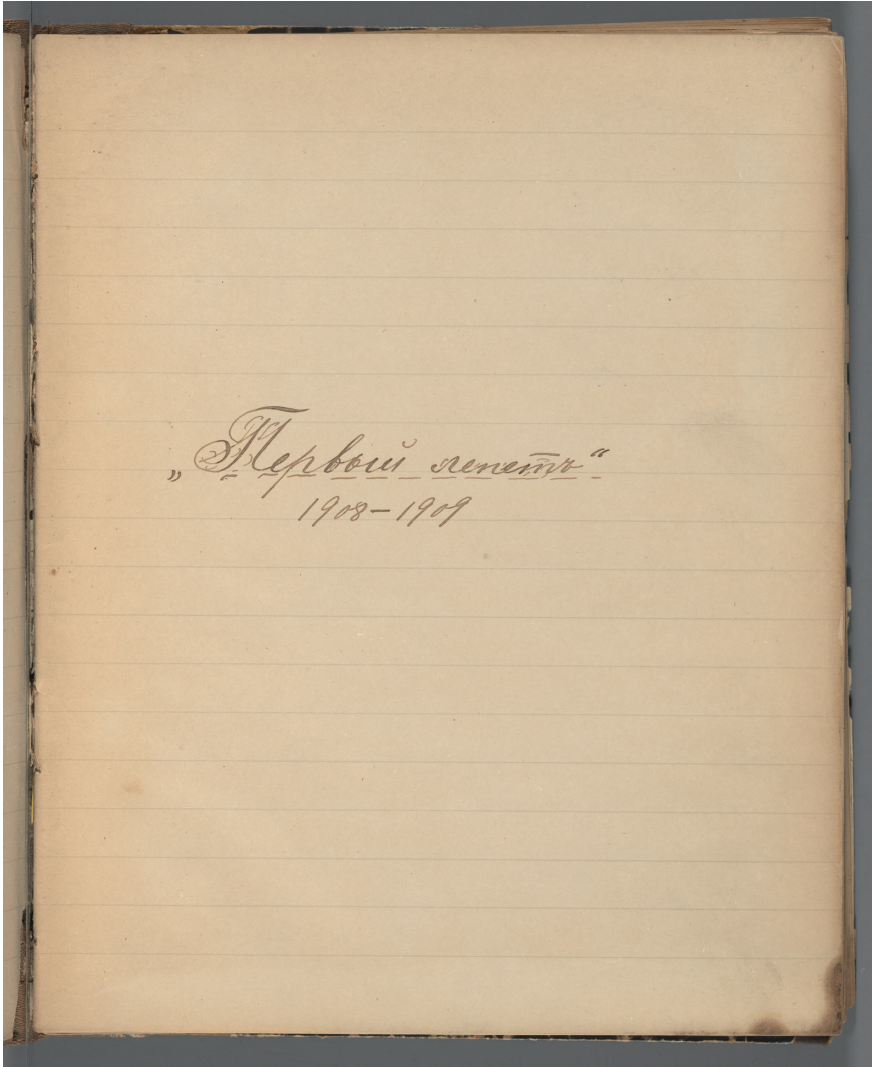


FIGURE 3 Photo of the cover page of Naimy's series of poems *Pervyi lepet* 1908-1909 ("The First Babble," 1908-1909) taken from his seminarian notebook

Arabic.⁶⁸ Zhukovskii is particularly relevant to "Fishermen," given his influential translations from German of folklore-inspired ballads by Schiller and Gottfried August Bürger.⁶⁹

68 'Arīḏah's translations are held in the Haddad Collection.

69 For Zhukovsky's translations, see Charles E. Passage, "The Influence of Schiller in Russia 1800-1840," *The American Slavic and East European Review* 5.1/2 (1946): 111-137.

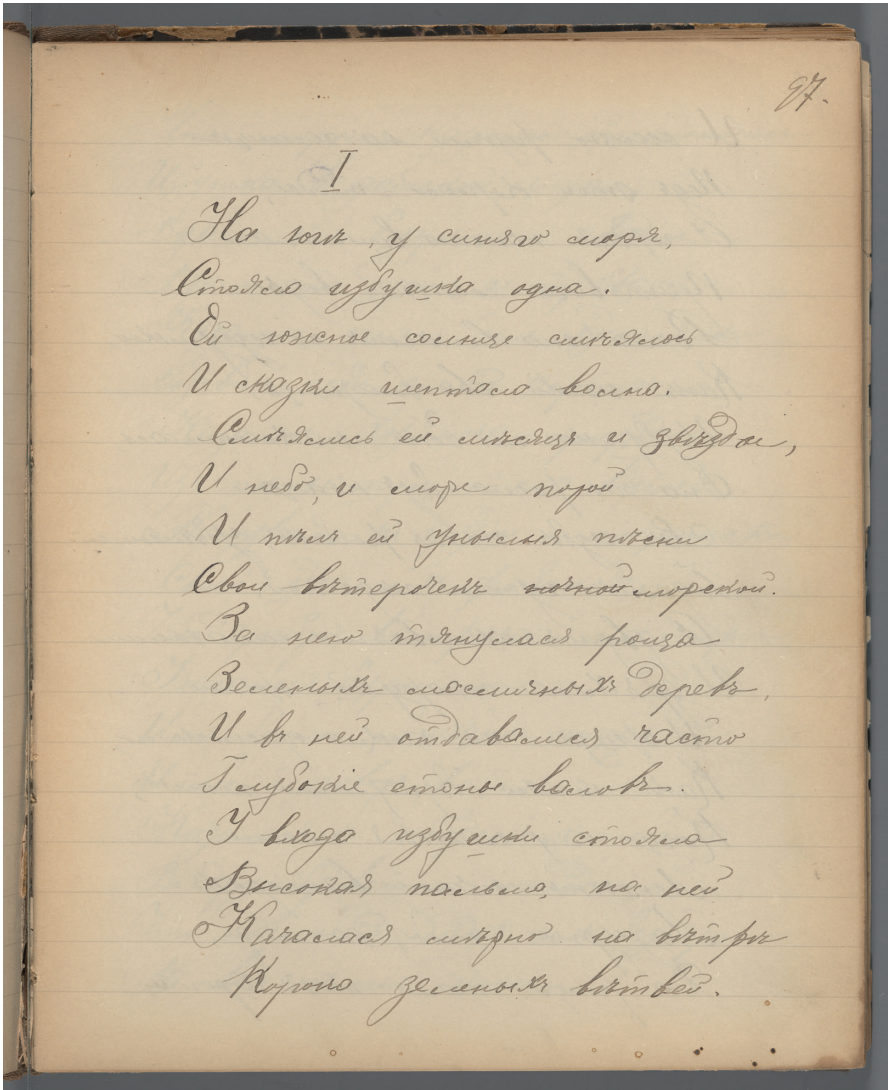


FIGURE 4 Photo of the first page of Naimy's ballad "Rybaki" ("Fishermen") taken from his seminarian notebook

The plot of "Fishermen" concerns two brothers, who, despite having been warned by their mother, go fishing during a heavy storm, wreck their boat, encounter mermaids, and are kidnapped by two knights. The poet's description of these events (see Table 2) is redolent with folkloric imagery that mirrors the aesthetic of Zhukovskii and other Russian Romantics.

The ruler promises the captives a prosperous life in his country in exchange for twelve years of hard labor in the coalmines (*rudnikakh*). They visit the mines where “hundreds of people languish” as “their life extinguishes gradually.” The poet grows shrill with indignation at the injustice of such labor: “Despicable metal they mine / From there and they perish / Seeing no bright sun / No sky, no stars, no moon.” As they are covered in dust, “It seemed that not people, but sounds / were pushing into the bosom of the earth.” The poet

TABLE 2 Excerpt from Part IV of Naimy's “Rybaki” (“Fishermen”)

<p>Но вот, куполами сияя На солнце предстал их глазам Какой-то огромный город, Раскинутый вдоль по холмам. Куда ни посмотришь, белеют Дворцы и хоромы везде, Которых красотой и богатством Не встретишь подобных нигде. Кругом них сады зеленеют И дремлют на солнце плоды, И тихо струятся по камням Алмазным потоки воды, Где ветер, деревья качая И сон навевая на них, С далека сладчайшие звуки Несет им на крыльях своих; Где море не стонет, не плачет, А сладкие песни поет И влагой живой постоянно Дома и сады обдает. И в этот же город роскошный Два рыцаря пленных ввели, И пленным на миг показалось, Что стали они вне земли. Что чудом они прилетели В какой-то заоблачный мир, Где люди живут без печали, И пышен их жизненный пир.</p>	<p>Suddenly, glimmering with its domes appeared before their eyes in the sun some huge city, stretched along the hills. Wherever you look, white palaces and mansions loom, the beauty and wealth of which are nowhere to be found. Around them gardens are greening, and fruits doze in the sun, and, quietly over stones flow diamond streams of water. Where the wind, while shaking trees and casting upon them a dream, carries sweet sounds from afar to them on its wings. Where the sea does not moan, does not cry, but is singing sweet songs, and with an exuberant dampness constantly splashing on houses and gardens. and to the same luxurious city two imprisoned knights were brought. and for a moment it seemed to the captives that they stood above the earth, that a miracle brought them, flying to some sky-high world, where people live without sorrows and the feast of their lives is magnificent.</p>
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describes the burial of one of the workers who dies in a coal mine in terms that vividly convey his passion for social justice:

И в землю навеки кладут.	And they interred him in the soil forever.
Хоронят, а ветер уныло	They buried him, and the wind is dully
Поет над лицом мертвеца.	lamenting the dead man's face.
И, кажется, волны с тоскою	And it seems the waves echo to him
Вторят ему: « Жаль молодца! »	with longing: "Poor young man!"
[...]	[...]
И так незаметно для мира	And so invisible to the world
Течет эта жизнь на горах,	this life flows on the mountains,
Где смерть себе гнездышко свила	where death has nailed itself a nest
На бедных рабочих плечах.	on the poor workers' shoulders.

In the end, missing his village, language, and way of life as a fisherman, one brother returns home. To be more exact, he returns because he is repelled by the prosperous life promised by the king, which relies on the exploitation of the poor and perpetuates social injustice.

This ballad carries many markers of the ballads of Zhukovskii, Samuel Taylor Coleridge, and Romantic poets: the story is set in the distant past; it introduces fantastic plot elements borrowed from folklore, and mythological creatures act alongside humans. The souls, hearts, and consciences of his heroes intermingle with their dark premonitions and irrational attachments. The detailed descriptions of the sea we find in this poem are commonly found in Romantic ballads, for example Coleridge's "Rime of the Ancient Mariner" (1834). And yet there is a difference: even in this early work, Naimy exhibits a profound social conscience. The critique of injustice suffuses this poem.

The last part of the poem, in which one of the brothers rejects a luxurious lifestyle on the grounds that whatever is created for rich people is only made possible at the expense of the work of common laborers, carries traces of critical realism (*kriticheskii realizm*), a literary movement with which Naimy would have been closely familiar, in which Tolstoy, Gogol, and other Russian writers used their fiction to critically depict exploitative relations and other forms of oppression. Even more striking than the poem's fantastical elements is its interest in the working conditions of laborers, and of miners in particular. During the same time that he wrote "Fishermen," Naimy reflected in his notebook on the spiritual crisis that led to the composition of this poem:

Here it is: the world, turned upside down. The world, whose heart is in your pocket, [...] And the most disgusting thing is that this world openly

declares its faith in God, who is the embodiment of light, justice, beauty and love. But if everything went according to the revelation of faith, there would not be so much suffering and misery, it would not have endured such an order when some people stand above others, when one is honest and the other is mean, one is hungry, and the other is hungry, one king and the other is a slave. [...] Notwithstanding its open spaces, this world is [...] suffocating in the dust and smoke of its sins. Its dust hurts me, and its smoke blinds me. And I am a stranger, a stranger in it.⁷⁰

These reflections, which were composed during the same time that Naimy wrote “Fishermen,” shed light on the author’s emergent political consciousness as well as on the narrative arc of his poem.

Naimy’s poem “Son” (“Dream”) was also written under the influence of Zhukovskii. Like “Fishermen,” “Dream” is written in iambic tetrameter, the most common meter in Russian poetry, used in such classic works as Pushkin’s *Eugene Onegin* (1837) and Lermontov’s “Son” (1841). Dreams are widely represented in Romantic poetry and feature in “Fishermen” as well. In Russian literature, the motif of the dream is widespread and often suggests a world that can only be accessed by those who have achieved a special, visionary, and unconscious state of mind.⁷¹ Like “Fishermen,” Naimy’s poem “Dream” follows the Russian tradition in giving voice to the sharp dissonance between the ideal and the real. In the poem, the poet reports a dream in which he was wandering amid an angry crowd. Seeking to escape, he climbed a hill, at the top of which stood a young lady from that crowd. She asked him to approach her, to take a laurel wreath from her head and replace it with his own, sang a song to him, and blessed him. Soon he saw a giant who wanted to kill him with an arrow fired from a bow. The crowd stood idly by. Suddenly, he was seized by an ethereal spirit and whisked away. The poet then found himself at a foothill and heard the voice of the young lady again, encouraging him to climb the hill up and reach its top. She said the poet would find there eternal spring, and enjoy love and brotherhood. She said that Jesus lived there with them. The poet began to climb the hill, with his female friend leading the way. With their emphasis on the poet’s unique vision, “Fishermen” and “Dream” gesture towards the theme

70 Nu’aymah, *Sab’un: ḥikāyat ‘umr. 1889-1909. Al-marḥalah al ‘ulā. 1889-1911.* 219, 220.

71 A. M. Remizov, *Ogon’ veshchei [The Fire of Things]* (Moscow: Sovetskaia Rossiia 1989), 144, and Iu. A. Kumbasheva, “Motiv sna v russkoi lirike pervoi tret’i XIX veka” (“Dream Motive in The Russian Literature of the First Third of the 19th Century”). Diss. St. Petersburg State University, 2001.

that was to dominate Naimy's literary output and which has long figured centrally in both Russian and Arabic literature: the poet as prophet.

The third Russian poem by Naimy which we discovered in his seminary notebook is "K stoletiu godovshchiny rozhdenia Nikolaia Vas'levicha Gogolia" ("To the One Hundred Anniversary of Nikolai Vasil'evich Gogol"). It shares with the other two poems an interest in the role of the poet as a prophet. As indicated by the title, the poem is dedicated to the Russian novelist Nikolai Gogol. However, it does not deal with Gogol, and the reason for the title is unclear. The most palpable influence on the poem is that of Gavrila Derzhavin, an eighteenth-century Russian poet best known for his classical odes. In this poem, Naimy adopted Derzhavin's rhythm, tone, metaphors, syntax, and even vocabulary, including adjectives such as *gordyi* (proud) and *velichnyi* (majestic), and phrases such as *chelo bessmertnoe* (immortal brow), and *venok lavroyi* (laurel wreath). He achieved a certain beauty and solemnity by blending together different styles and by adapting Derzhavin's regal language to his lyric voice.

Naimy's ode on the occasion of Gogol's centenary also recalls Pushkin's juxtaposition between the poet and the crowd in his poem "Poet i tolpa" ("The Poet and the Crowd," 1828), and "Prorok" ("The Prophet," 1826), in which the chosen poet gazes on the world with the eyes of a prophet who has been given the divine command to burn people's hearts with a word (*glagolom zhgi sertsu luidi*). Gifted with supra-human literary powers, the poet is able to see and perceive the world in a special way. Poets are destined to be alone, Naimy suggests in this poem, and to exist in spiritual unity with other poets who have been touched by God. They are messengers between God and the crowd. Naimy's poem on Gogol's centenary concludes with an evocation of Pushkin's poet-prophet ideal:⁷²

Он нас куда-то призываетъ
Жестами легкими руки,
А вдохновенный взор пылаетъ,
Нъмой исполненный тоски.
И что-то бледными губами
Неслышно шепчет нам поэтъ,
Глядя печальными глазами
На наш унылый, мрачный свѣтъ.

He calls us somewhere
with light gestures of a hand.
His inspired gaze burns
full of silent anguish.
And with the pale lips
the poet whispers to us inaudibly,
gazing with sad eyes
at our sad and gloomy earth.

72 Naimy's notebook (Haddad collection, box two), 143.

Naḥḍah Multilingualism and Arabic Cosmopolitanism

Beyond demonstrating the crucial role of Russian in Naimy's literary output, we have aimed in these pages to make a case for a different way of thinking about literary multilingualism and the various forms of self-translation that result from the effort to balance different linguistic identities. In concluding, we offer some brief reflections, first about the broader significance of Naimy's literary endeavours in Russian for the Arabic modernism that he helped to shape, and secondly, for what the example of Arabic cosmopolitanism that was set by his literary legacy tells us about the role of multilingualism and migration in shaping culture.

In technical terms, working in foreign iambs in his Russian compositions enabled Naimy to skilfully select and combine different meters. But the value of Naimy's multilingual outlook reaches beyond the technical skills it helped him to develop. As the four poems—"Frozen River," "Fishermen," "Dream," and his poem on Gogol's centenary—discussed in this article show, in his Russian verse, Naimy integrated multiple literary movements from world literature, and in particular Romanticism in its Russian variant, which he encountered in the poetry of Zhukovskii, Nikitin, Lermontov, and Pushkin. Indeed, Naimy's ability to introduce a Romantic aesthetic into Arabic literature was shaped by his formative engagement with Russian poets.⁷³ Such eclectic syntheses are often found among writers who belong to so-called peripheral literatures, such as Arabic was for Naimy during his childhood. These literatures tend to have more porous literary periodizations than dominant European canons allow for. When authors from such literatures participate in global literary movements, they compress, invert and otherwise rearrange the periodization of the dominant culture.⁷⁴ In this case, the specific sequence of Naimy's encounter with world literature through a Russian prism shaped the way in which he filtered world literary movements into Arabic.

Naimy developed new forms, rhymes, and themes in Arabic poetry by first imitating Russian poetry. His Eastern Orthodox Christian background, his education at Russian missionary schools, in Mandate Palestine and subsequently Ukraine, the influence of the *naḥḍah*, his émigré status, and, finally, his anxious desire to develop an Arabic modernism that could compete with the Russian canon all shaped his unique literary contribution. He adapted

73 On Naimy as a Romantic Poet, see Robin Ostle, "The Romantic Poets," *Modern Arabic Literature*, ed. M. M. Badawi (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 95-101.

74 On the relativity of periodization in literature, see Eric Hayot, "Against Periodization; or, On Institutional Time," *New Literary History* 42.4 (2011): 739-756.

for Arabic literature techniques that were used in Russian poetry and in the Russian Orthodox liturgy: parallelism (*verset*), repetition, refrains, alliteration, exclamations, and assonance—especially when the subject matter was emotional—and lyricism.⁷⁵ The experience that Naimy gained from writing poetry in Russian helped him to extend the horizons of Arabic poetics and to develop alternatives to classical forms.

What matters in Naimy's case is not merely what his Russian education meant to him as an Arabic writer. Rather, his literary trajectory offers a case study in how multilingualism acts as a stimulus to literary culture, and specifically to literary modernism. Naimy was not the first writer—nor will he be the last—to discover himself as a writer in a language that was not his own. As Translation Studies scholar Loredana Polezzi notes in her discussion of self-translation and the role of the immigrant writer: the “choice of a language other than one's mother tongue also brings with it an additional degree of, if not an insistent requirement for, creative freedom: being oneself in the language of the other can be the ultimate act of self-fashioning.”⁷⁶

For many writers, such choices are fraught with agony and fears of inadequacy. As noted above, Naimy's close collaborator 'Arīḍah never became a successful writer in English even though he lived in America until his death in 1946, many years after Naimy's return to Lebanon in 1932. While literary multilingualism is not a universal panacea for everyone, authors like Naimy who managed to move across multiple linguistic terrains found freedom in these physical and intellectual migrations. They discovered their voices in foreign tongues and thereby learned to transform the languages that were native to them, such as Arabic, as well as the ones, such as English, which they subsequently acquired.⁷⁷

Contesting literary models that remain tethered to monolingual models of literary production, Translation Studies scholarship increasingly insists on the intimate links between translation and migration. As Polezzi writes, “it is not only texts that travel, but also people.”⁷⁸ Examining the migration of

75 Moreh, “Poetry in Prose,” 330, 333, 339.

76 Loredana Polezzi, “Translation and migration,” *Translation Studies* 5.3 (2012): 351.

77 Many other literatures beyond Arabic exhibit similar patterns, whereby key modernist figures discover their voices through an encounter with foreign tongues. See for example Gayle Rogers, *Incomparable Empires: Modernism and the Translation of Spanish and American Literature* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2016) and Kayvan Tahmasebian and Rebecca Ruth Gould, “Translation as Alienation: Sufi Hermeneutics and Literary Modernism in Bijan Elahi's Translations,” *Modernism/Modernity* (Print Plus; DOI: <https://doi.org/10.26597/mod.0175>).

78 Polezzi, “Translation and migration,” 347.

texts alongside the migrations of people as we have done in tracing Naimy's peregrinations from the Levant to Ukraine to America—and from Russian to Arabic via English—helps us to better understand the lived impact of multilingualism, in this case on a specific authorial consciousness. In Naimy's case, reading his Russian poems as a prelude to his career as an Arabic author can help us develop "a partial response to negative models of translation seen as a form of control over linguistic heterogeneity."⁷⁹ In this article we have developed an account of Naimy as a multilingual writer whose creativity in Russian stimulated his development as an Arabic poet and critic. Judging based on the timing of his translation of "Frozen River" from Russian into Arabic, Naimy's encounter with English, alongside his experience as an immigrant, may have facilitated the confluence he experienced between these two languages.

The multilingual poetry of this cosmopolitan author can be used as the basis for a deeper study of *naḥḍah* multilingualism, including its role in shaping Arabic modernism. Beyond presenting multilingualism as a normative context for Arabic literary modernism, we have shown how self-translation stimulated Naimy's auspicious literary career, and expanded his social outlook. Naimy's Russian poetry offers a window onto how the traditions that shape poems written in one language can enrich an author's later literary production in an entirely different language. In doing so, they demonstrate that, to quote Russian theorist Mikhail Bakhtin, "one's own language is never a single language: in it there are always survivals of the past and a potential for other-linguagedness."⁸⁰

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79 Polezzi, "Translation and migration," 347.

80 Mikhail Mikhailovich Bakhtin, *The Dialogic imagination: Four essays*. Ed. Michael Holquist. Trans. Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1981), 66.