

Reuven Snir

**"My Iraq Was Lost Forever":  
Naïm Kattan and the Demise of Arab-Jewish  
Identity and Culture**

## Abstract

*Until the twentieth century, the great majority of Jews living under Islamic rule used Arabic as their first language, but since the establishment of the State of Israel, Arabic has been gradually disappearing as a language mastered by Jews. The present article focuses on the Iraqi-Jewish author Naïm Kattan, whose literary and intellectual experience has been a testimony to the demise of Arab-Jewish culture and identity. Unlike most of his Iraqi-Jewish colleagues, Kattan did not immigrate to Israel but preferred to go to study in Paris before eventually settling down in Montreal. He shifted to writing in French and won international recognition while going from being a secular Jew with a solid, fixed Arab-Iraqi identity in Baghdad to slowly becoming a Canadian citizen with a fluid Quebecois-French-Arab-Iraqi-Jewish identity in Montreal.*

## Résumé

*Jusqu'au vingtième siècle, la grande majorité des Juifs vivant sous le règne islamique utilisaient l'arabe comme première langue, mais depuis la création de l'État d'Israël, l'arabe disparaît progressivement en tant que langue maîtrisée par les Juifs. Le présent article se concentre sur l'auteur juif irakien Naïm Kattan, dont l'expérience littéraire et intellectuelle témoigne de la disparition de la culture et de l'identité judéo-arabe. Contrairement à la plupart de ses collègues juifs irakiens, Kattan n'a pas immigré en Israël mais a préféré aller étudier à Paris avant de s'installer à Montréal. Il s'est mis à écrire en français et a acquis une reconnaissance internationale en passant du statut de juif laïc à l'identité arabo-irakienne solide et fixe à Bagdad à celui de citoyen canadien à l'identité fluide québécoise-française-arabe-irakienne-juive à Montréal.*

“I started to write in French, and Arabic became the language of dream.”

— Naïm Kattan

In the sixth century AD, when Arabic reached its full development with the appearance of poetry of high standing, Jewish communities were flourishing throughout the Arabian Peninsula. Jews, as an integral part of Arab society, participated in the making of the local culture, and Jewish tribes had distinguished poets. The personal integrity of one such poet, al-Samaw'al ibn 'Ādiyā, became proverbial, and he has since been commemorated by the saying “*awfā min al-Samaw'al*” (“more loyal than al-Samaw'al”). The incident this saying refers to was his refusal to yield weapons entrusted to him, even when a Bedouin chieftain laid siege to his castle and murdered his son.<sup>1</sup> Describing the noble qualities of his own Arab-Jewish tribe, al-Samaw'al composed a poem, the opening verse of which was:

لَيْسَ مَجْهِي دَتْرِي إِادِرِ لُكُفٍ      مُضْرِعِ مَوْلَا نَمِ سَنَدِي مَلْ عَرْمَلَا إِذِ

When a man's honor is not defiled by baseness,

Then every cloak he cloaks himself in is comely.<sup>2</sup>

This poem, which even today is highly regarded in the Arabic literary tradition, testifies to the existence of a past in which no one would consider that being an Arab and a Jew at the same time was paradoxical. When, in the seventh century AD, Islam became the dominant faith and the defining legal and social framework, Jews were considered to be protégés (*Ahl al-Dhimma* [People of the Pact]) of the new religious community until the twentieth century. However, because of the escalation of the Arab-Israeli conflict over Palestine throughout the late 1940s, the Arab identity of the Jews, which had been firmly consolidated during the 1920s and 1930s, underwent a speedy fragmentation in a way that left Jews no alternative but to immigrate to Israel.

Since the 1950s, Arabized Jews have been gradually but deliberately excluded from Arabness to the point that we can now speak of an unspoken agreement between Zionism and Arab nationalism to carry out a total cleansing of Arab-Jewish culture. The national struggle over Palestine has by no means prevented the two movements from seeing eye to eye in this respect, despite the differences between them—the one inspired by European colonialism and the other being an anticolonial venture. Both movements have excluded the hybrid Arab-Jewish identity and highlighted instead a “pure” Jewish-Zionist identity against a “pure” Muslim-Arab one. We are in fact witnessing now the demise of Arab-Jewish culture—a tradition that started more than 1,500 years ago is vanishing before our eyes. Until the twentieth century, the great majority of the Jews under the rule of Islam used Arabic as their daily language; Arabic is currently gradually disappearing as a language mastered by Jews.<sup>3</sup>

Iraqi Jews who migrated to Israel during the 1950s continued their Arabic literary activities, despite the reluctance of the two clashing national movements to keep Arab-Jewish culture and identity alive. These attempts failed, and gradually most of them stopped writing in Arabic—only a few of them successfully shifted to writing in Hebrew, mainly in the field of fiction. The present article focuses on the Iraqi-Jewish author Naïm Kattan, who preferred in the late 1940s to go to study in Paris and then settle down in Montreal, where he shifted to writing in French and achieved an international literary reputation, despite retaining his Arab cultural preferences.

## Naïm Kattan and Arabic Literature

Unlike most of the Iraqi-Jewish intellectuals and writers who immigrated to Israel during the 1940s and 1950s, those who immigrated to other countries mostly ceased their creative literary and intellectual activities and became engaged in other occupations in order to start new lives in their new homelands. Apart from those Iraqi-Jewish intellectuals who turned to academic careers and used their expertise in the Arabic language and their various Arab-Muslim cultural experiences as a means to develop their academic scholarship, mainly in the field of Middle Eastern studies, almost all the Iraqi-Jewish immigrants to countries other than Israel stopped their direct literary and intellectual involvement not only in Arabic but also in the various languages they adopted in their new homelands. Naïm Kattan was the *only* Iraqi-Jewish author who achieved an international literary reputation, even more than the immigrant Iraqi-Jewish authors in Israel who continued to write in Arabic or who shifted later to writing in Hebrew. After traveling to Paris and then settling down in Montreal, he stopped writing in Arabic and shifted to writing in French. Integrating into Canadian and Quebecer society, he became one of the most prominent Jewish-Francophone writers in the world, and may be compared only to North African Jewish authors like the Egyptian-French writer and poet Edmond Jabès (1912–1991), the French-Tunisian writer Albert Memmi (1920–2020), and the Algerian-French writer and translator Albert Bensoussan (b. 1935).<sup>4</sup>

Naïm Kattan was born on August 26, 1928 in Baghdad to a bourgeois family; his father worked in the Iraqi state-owned post company and adopted European manners. The members of his family used to speak among themselves in the Baghdadi Jewish dialect—each religious community in Baghdad had its own communal dialect.<sup>5</sup> However, outside the home, they used to speak the Baghdadi Muslim dialect, while they used standard Arabic language in their correspondence. In his youth, Kattan joined the Baghdadi YMCA club, taking advantage of its excellent library where he could borrow and read English books. As for Arabic books, he was able to order them from the Bāb al-Mu‘azzam library, and he borrowed French books from the library in the school he was educated at, the Alliance Israélite Universelle (AIU). This school emphasized linguistic skills in Arabic and French together with English, and introduced the students to Hebrew, but only for religious purposes. As an Arab-Jewish intellectual, Kattan also studied the Qur’ān.<sup>6</sup> This was by no means rare among Jewish students in Baghdad at the time, nor was it unusual in the history of the Jews under Islam.

In June 1941, the *Farhūd* pogrom was carried out against Jews, mainly in Baghdad.<sup>7</sup> One hundred and fifty Jews were killed and Jewish property was looted leading to the obfuscation of the Jewish role in Iraqi society by implying doubts about the Jews’ loyalty. Torn by centrifugal and centripetal forces, these events pushed Jews into joining opposition groups, particularly the Communist Party and the Zionist move-

ment. But these bloody events did by no means change Kattan's own Iraqi patriotism and preferences for Iraqi nationalism and Arab culture: "As Iraqi Jews," Kattan indicated, "we had left [the *Farhūd*] events behind us—although cautious and anxious, we were only trying to think how we could continue to live in Iraq, as in the past. We tried to build a new Iraq together with the other Iraqi intellectuals."<sup>8</sup> As most of the Iraqi-Jewish intellectuals at the time, in the wake of the creation of the state of modern Iraq, Kattan was inspired by a cultural vision encapsulated by the eloquent secularist dictum "*al-dīnu li-llāhi wa-l-waṭanu li-l-jamī*" ("Religion is for God, the Fatherland is for everyone")—it was employed as part of the Arabization vision of secular Jewish intellectuals who sought to remind people of the close symbiotic contact that Jews had with the wider Arab-Muslim culture.

Kattan's quasi-autobiographical novel *Adieu, Babylone* (1975), which attempted to recapture and reinvent salient moments of the unnamed narrator's life, includes a dramatization of the *Farhūd* to which the author was a witness as a young boy:<sup>9</sup>

Memories of the *Farhoud* were growing distant. We were united to our Muslim and Christian brothers. At last we were going to forget our distinguishing marks, tear down fences. We would reject any grounds for discord, refuse to assign malicious intentions to our companions. We wanted at all costs to maintain confidence, for otherwise we would be the only losers [...] Our field was literature and our place had already been designated: among the Muslims.<sup>10</sup>

Referring to his activities at the time, Kattan saw himself as a faithful son of the new Iraqi state and nation: "I wrote in Arabic and considered myself as among the creators of the literature in my homeland."<sup>11</sup> Kattan's choice reflected his commitment not only to staying in Iraq, but to serving its culture.<sup>12</sup> He was not unique among his Iraqi-Jewish colleagues—the Balfour Declaration was considered by many Arabized Jews as encapsulating the vision and hopes of only European Ashkenazi Jews. For most of the Jews in the Arab world, the idea of establishing a Jewish nation-state in Palestine was at the time a far-off cloud, totally undesired. The real national vision of most of the Iraqi Jews, certainly of the intellectual secular elite, was Iraqi and Arab.

Kattan's interest in Arabic literature started very early. In his aforementioned novel, he tells us how his brother used to gladly show him the latest issue of the journal *al-Ḥāṣid* (The Reaper) (1929–1938), published by the Iraqi-Jewish poet and writer Anwar Shā'ul (1904–1984).<sup>13</sup> *Al-Ḥāṣid* was among several Arabic journals published in Baghdad during 1920s and 1930s, and it inspired Jewish youth to be involved in Arabic literature. These journals were published by the first generation of Iraqi-Jewish writers and intellectuals who were very active in the revival of Arabic press and literary periodicals in Baghdad since the early 1920s. Anwar Shā'ul was also the first editor of the journal *al-Miṣbāḥ* (The Candelabrum, 1924–1929), and the fact that he adopted the pseudonym Ibn al-Samaw'al in the journal, an allusion to the afore-

mentioned Jewish pre-Islamic poet, only strengthened Kattan's awareness that his Arab cultural preferences were extensions of those of previous Arab-Jewish poets and writers.

And indeed, when Kattan was only 14 years old he contributed his first short story to the journal *al-Majalla* [The Magazine], which was edited by the Iraqi writer Dhū al-Nūn Ayyūb (1908-1988), one of the pioneering writers of Iraqi fiction.<sup>14</sup> In the middle of the 1940s, Kattan joined a circle of ambitious young intellectuals: Muslims, Christians, and Jews alike who were committed to building a new Iraq that would demolish the walls put up by prejudice and misunderstanding. Kattan collaborated with his colleagues in establishing and editing Arabic periodicals, with a personal emphasis on striving to promote French literature. In the middle of the 1940s, he contributed to *Ṣawt al-Ahālī* (The Voice of the Citizens) and *al-Fikr al-Ḥadīth* (The New Thought), edited by the artist Jamīl Ḥammūdī (1924-2003), the latter was one of the pioneering cultural journals in the Arab world, mainly due to its comprehensive conception of culture, literature, art, and the interactions between them, and due to its openness to new modernist artistic trends. Kattan contributed a series of essays on Surrealism to the journal, which was considered to be the first serious discussion on the topic in Iraq.<sup>15</sup> The Iraqi scholar Sāmī Mahdī (b. 1940) dedicated a separate chapter to this journal in his study about Iraqi periodicals, wherein he emphasized the significant role that Kattan played in its development.<sup>16</sup>

The cultural association *al-Waqt al-Ḍā'i'* (The Lost Time) and its literary journal deserve special attention. There, Kattan collaborated with two of the prominent Iraqi intellectuals at the time, the poet Buland al-Ḥaydarī (1926-1996) and the journalist 'Adnān Ra'ūf (1926-1998). They adopted at the time existentialist positions inspired by French thinkers like Jean-Paul Sartre (1905-1980) and Albert Camus (1913-1960). Since Kattan was the only member in the group who read French, he was able to write about these thinkers and their philosophical and literary contributions.

### **Identity Enriching: The Shift to French**

The *Farhūd* had not changed Kattan's confidence that Iraq was his only homeland, but he could by no means ignore the bloody events and the victims killed among his very religious community. The fact that Jews, who then accounted for almost a quarter of Baghdad's population, were treated by some circles as foreigners, inspired him to think of a passible refuge. His involvement in writing about French cultural issues in Iraqi periodicals encouraged him to seek a fellowship to study in Paris.<sup>17</sup> Indeed, Kattan obtained a scholarship from the French government to study French literature at the Sorbonne from 1947 to 1952. This was mainly thanks to the help of the French Orientalist Jean Gaulmier (1905-1997), who had visited Baghdad in 1943 in order to organize the examinations at AIU, where he met Kattan and learned to appreciate his talents and his interest in French culture, and promised to help him to

enroll in a French institution of higher education. Kattan's initial hope was to study in Beirut, but the Sorbonne was not a bad consolation prize. Gaulmier's encouragement and help changed Kattan's life. As a result, Kattan would keep in touch with him throughout his life and would also pay him homage in his works.<sup>18</sup> In his years in Paris, Kattan never abandoned his interest in Arabic literature and culture, and continued to write on these topics for Iraqi newspapers such as *al-Sha 'b* (The People) and Lebanese journals such as *al-Adib* (The Author).

At a certain stage during his stay in Paris, Kattan started to sign his articles under a pseudonym. He did this not so much to protect himself, but so as to keep his family out of trouble and to reserve the possibility of freely writing on politics. Also, in Paris he began to reclaim his Jewish religion and culture, not only as an external formal marker but as an essential component of his personal identity. While in Baghdad, he kept referring to only Arab and Muslim issues, but now issues related to Judaism started to occupy him. After listening to stories from Holocaust survivors, Kattan became aware of his Jewish roots not as a mere means of religious affiliation but as something with serious historical and cultural implications.<sup>19</sup> Israel's proclamation as a Jewish state took place eight months after his arrival in Paris, and Kattan understood right there and then that he could not return to Iraq. Also, against the background of the increasing wave of harassment and systematic persecution of Jews in Iraq, in 1951 most members of his family joined the mass immigration of the Iraqi Jews to Israel. His elder brother had been arrested before their immigration after he had been accused of collaborating with Zionists and Communists, even though there had been no connection between the two movements. Their political agendas were contradictory, but both of them shared the desire to replace the Iraqi regime. After several bureaucratic wrangles, Kattan obtained a refugee certificate. This was also the time when he started to shift from writing in Arabic to writing in French.

In 1954, Kattan immigrated to Montreal and became a naturalized Canadian citizen five years later. But Montreal soon proved to be much more than only a new physical and spatial refuge for Kattan. This became all the more true after he became convinced that it was impossible for him to return to Baghdad in order to realize his early dream as an Iraqi national patriot, to be an Arabic author. Since "it is in part through the access to new spaces that we may enrich our identities," the settling down in a new place was also for Kattan a new birth.<sup>20</sup> In his own words: "Each city where you decide to stay announces a new birth." He repeatedly declared that he was born three times and each time in a different city: Baghdad, Paris, and Montreal: "Each of these cities consists of the other two—Baghdad exists in Paris, and Paris is integrated into Montreal."<sup>21</sup> His book *Les villes de naissance* (2001) illustrates this very idea.<sup>22</sup> And indeed, in Montreal Kattan was born again and emerged as a writer with international reputation but *not* in Arabic, as he had dreamed and planned to be when he had been young: "I started to write in French, and Arabic became the language of dream."<sup>23</sup> Although Kattan's native language was Arabic, and despite being

fluent in English, he started to write *only* in French. This was the reason why he was generally overlooked by English–Canadian critics, despite his receiving institutional awards and rising to prominence as an influential cultural bureaucrat and a recognized novelist, short-story writer, critic, and essayist. English–Canadian circles felt distanced from him because his novels and short stories were written in French, though some of them were translated into English.<sup>24</sup>

Kattan's first book in his new adopted language, *Le réel et le théâtral*, which won him the France–Canada Prize in 1971, was initially an essay published in *La Nouvelle Revue Française (NRF)*.<sup>25</sup> The essay had been enlarged to a collection of critical essays bearing the title of the original piece. In this collection, Kattan's very first work in French, we can find the foundations of his thoughts, "which tend to spill over onto his fiction as well."<sup>26</sup> The last essay in the book, "La parole et le lieu," relied on Kattan's personal experience, mainly on the shift in his creative language and the new layers with which he consciously would enrich his identity.<sup>27</sup> In my view, this very essay was the reason for the considerable international acclaim that the book won him. I assume that if Kattan had written the same book in Arabic, his mother tongue—and many of his Iraqi–Jewish colleagues continued to write in Arabic—the book would have never achieved such an international reputation. Moreover, that Arabic book would have never been translated into French: we can rarely see books by Arab–Jewish authors translated from Arabic into French. Unlike the French cultural milieu, which was very convenient for and responsive to Arabic authors from North Africa who adopted French as their second literary creative language, the new Canadian cultural and intellectual space was never accustomed to seeing among its members an Arab–Jewish author writing in Arabic.<sup>28</sup> In fact, to my knowledge, Kattan is the only Iraqi–Jewish author who has so far achieved an international reputation in French.

Kattan's gradual shift to writing only in French was accompanied by what, in retrospect, seems to be a personal process of consciously developing a more complicated and enriched identity. This was by no means a planned erosion in Kattan's Arab–Jewish identity, but instead added new components to his personal identity under the impact of the new temporal and spatial circumstances in his new area of exile. After his emigration from Baghdad, Kattan frequently emphasized the need of the human being to frequently change fixed spaces and to prefer the fluidity of identities. In this regard, Kattan said: "I do not accept the fixity of safe places or the comfort of certitudes."<sup>29</sup> Furthermore, unlike his tendency while in Baghdad to distant himself from Jewish religion and to stress his Iraqi patriotism and Arab cultural preferences, the French–Canadian cultural and spatial identity paradoxically strengthened the Jewish cultural layers of Kattan's own identity. It was illustrated, for example, in his decision to become active with the new *Cercle Juif de la langue française*, an initiative of the Canadian Jewish Congress to foster understanding between Jews and the Quebec majority. Kattan founded its first Canadian non–Catholic French–language publication *Le Bulletin du Cercle juif*, a



ground-breaking platform to further that cultural exchange, which he would edit between 1954 and 1967.

Kattan soon realized that his relationship with Judaism had become a fact of daily life, a concrete, vital reality. His new community referred to him as representing the Jews and as a speaker for Judaism, whereas in Baghdad, his Jewish faith had been little more than a formal religious affiliation within a multicultural and secular society. In fact, it was a minor, marginal component of his identity at the time, one which most contemporary Baghdadi secular Jewish intellectuals preferred to hide in order to be accepted by the Muslim majority.

Now, his Jewishness became a solid and prominent part of his identity. The strengthening of his Jewish religious awareness came mainly because of the attitude toward him and the expectations of the intellectual French-Canadian-Quebecer community that he had so gladly joined. This community is a story of immigrants from Europe, the Middle East, and the Far East, especially of people with multiple ethnic origins and multiple faiths. Kattan has been presented as a "ferryman" of the three cultures forming his multiple identity (Jewish, Arab, and Francophone) emphasizing mainly his situation as a "passer-by" evolving into a "passenger" and a nomad of writing and culture highlighting "his role of transcultural intermediary, both Quebecer and Canadian, between Jews and Catholics, Anglophones and Francophones, in spite of his condition as a member of the Jewish Iraqi minority in Europe as well as in Canada."<sup>30</sup>

Kattan had already started the "project" of enriching his own personal identity in the early 1960s, when he became a columnist for the *Nouveau Journal* and a commentator on international affairs, and then a lecturer at the Faculty of Social Sciences at Laval University in Quebec City. While in Iraq, the Jewish components of his identity were marginal and in any event they never diminished his solid Iraqi-Arab cultural inclinations. In the new cultural French-Canadian-Quebecer space, those same components became central, but the Iraqi-Arab identity markers enabled him to serve as an expert in Middle Eastern cultural and political issues.

Kattan, who had come up as a young Arabic author, shifted his intellectual and poetic preferences and became a French writer par excellence. The choice of French as the language of his daily use and of his writing encapsulated this shift: it goes without saying that heading the Literature and Publishing Department of the Canada Council for the Arts between 1967 and 1990 was fundamental in this process as well as his acceptance in the early 1990s of the position of writer-in-residence at the Department of Literary Studies of the Université du Québec à Montréal (UQAM), and then the position of associate professor, which he held from 1993 to 2014.

One can hardly think of Kattan as an exile in Montreal, certainly not from the point of view of his own feelings, as they were illustrated in his writings and sayings. The Jewish writer of Egyptian origin André Aciman (b. 1951) defines the exile not as someone who just has lost his home but as “someone who can’t find another, who can’t think of another. [...] Some people bring exile with them the way they bring it upon themselves wherever they go.”<sup>31</sup> Unlike Aciman, Kattan found another home, another language, and he tried *not* to bring his exile to his new physical, social, intellectual, cultural, and literary space. As a prolific writer in French, he became one of French Canada’s premier authors:

Changing one’s language means more than mastering a new one [...] The effects are profound, even though they are imperceptible at the beginning [...] The attraction of France was too great: I could not succumb to the enticements of exile.<sup>32</sup>

An autobiographical style characterized Kattan’s early short stories and novels and the events he had undergone in Baghdad inspired his literary writings, but in many works he reaches beyond incidents in his own life. More than sixty years after his 1947 departure from the city, he indicated:

I often dream of Baghdad, the streets of my childhood, the storms and agitations of adolescence. I departed from the city of my birth more than half a century ago. Have I ever left it? Its presence in my writings is a testament to a living, indeed vital, memory.<sup>33</sup>

We are currently witnessing the demise of Arab–Jewish culture. A tradition that started more than 1,500 years ago is vanishing before our very own eyes. The main factor in the Muslim–Christian–Jewish Arab symbiosis up to the twentieth century was that the great majority of the Jews under the rule of Islam had adopted Arabic as their language. Now, Arabic is gradually disappearing as a language spoken by Jews. The image of an hourglass is an apposite one for the magnitude of cultural loss: the grains of sand are quickly running out. Furthermore, in the field of literature, *there is not even one Jewish writer of record who was born after 1948 and is still writing in Arabic*. A Jew who is now fluent in Arabic must have either been born in an Arab country (and their numbers, of course, are rapidly decreasing) or have acquired the language as part of his or her training for service in the military or security services (and their numbers, needless to say, are always increasing). The Israeli–Jewish canonical elite does not see Arabic and Arab culture as intellectual assets, and there is no better illustration of this point than the structure of the comparative literature departments at Israeli universities, where one can hardly find tenured scholars with knowledge of Arabic or its literature. In short, we all know that the chapter of Arab–Jewish cultural symbiosis has reached its end, and that the hourglass will not be turned over anytime soon, if at all.<sup>34</sup>

*Adieu, Babylone*, in which Kattan recounts his own experiences as a Jew growing up in Baghdad in a Muslim-dominated society between the start of the Second World War and the birth of Israel, "functions as a loving homage to a time and community that has since virtually disappeared."<sup>35</sup> Brian Lynch writes that the novel reveals "history as it was experienced," and it is also a reminder "that cities and nations are living, past-ingrained entities, rooted not in some overarching political or military abstraction but in the teeming thoughts and closely guarded hopes of the individual mind."<sup>36</sup> But one must remember that the novel was written many years after Kattan left Baghdad and after his dream of being among the founders of a new Iraq had totally shattered. In retrospect, it seems that Kattan understood that his decision to travel to Paris to study and then his settling down in Montreal and, above all, the shift to writing in French were successful "decisions," if we may refer to them at all as conscious choices. After all, none of the Iraqi-Jewish authors, nor any Jewish writers in Arabic from his generation (or previous or subsequent generations) achieved a cultural and literary reputation of his magnitude, or a similar international cultural status, certainly not authors who had tried to continue writing in Arabic, and not even those who shifted to writing in Hebrew.

About 1,400 years before Kattan got on the bus taking him to Beirut, from where he would be sailing for Marseilles to start the new chapter in his life, the Jewish-Arab poet al-Samaw'al ibn 'Ādiyā' with whom we opened our article had become well known as one of the most famous poets of his time thanks to the aforementioned poem with which he bragged about the history of his clan and its members' noble qualities. Kattan and many other Jewish authors and intellectuals during the late 1940s were "more loyal than al-Samaw'al" to their beloved Iraqi homeland and its people, and, like al-Samaw'al, they used to brag about the history and the noble qualities of the Arabs. The great tragedy, however, would become clear to them only some years later they witnessed the failure of the Iraqi nation-state to achieve what they, as young Iraqi-Arab intellectuals, had hoped for. Three years before his death, Kattan sadly admitted that "today, I think that my Iraq was lost forever."<sup>37</sup> The Arab reader can hardly ignore how these words have been inspired by a verse written more than one thousand years ago by the great Muslim poet Abū al-Ṭayyib al-Mutanabbī (915-965), one of the Arab-Jewish authors' favorite poets from the golden age of Arabic poetry:

كُلُّرِدِّيْ عُرْمَلَا يَنْمَتِيْ اَمْ لُكْ اَمْ

نُفْسَلَا يَهْتَشِتْ اَلْ اَهْبْ حُايِرَلَا يَرْجِتْ

A man can never gain everything he hopes for,

The winds blow contrary to what ships wish.<sup>38</sup>

**Reuven Snir** is professor of Arabic language and literature at the University of Haifa. He teaches courses on Arabic poetry, Palestinian theatre, Sufism, and Arab–Jewish culture. Snir has published in Arabic, Hebrew, and English and translated poetry between the three languages. His last books in English: *Baghdad: The City in Verse* (Harvard University Press, 2013); *Who Needs Arab–Jewish Identity? Interpellation, Exclusion, and Inessential Solidarities* (Brill, 2015); *Modern Arabic Literature: A Theoretical Framework* (Edinburgh University Press, 2017); and *Arab–Jewish Literature: The Birth & Demise of the Arab–Jewish Short Story* (Brill, 2019), *Contemporary Arabic Literature: Heritage and Innovation* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2023); and *Palestinian and Arab–Jewish Cultures: Language, Literature and Identity* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2023).

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See Aḥmad ibn Muḥammad al-Maydānī, *Majma' al-Arthāl* [The Assembly of Proverbs], ed. Na'im Ḥusayn Zarzūr (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyya, 1988), II, 441–42.

2

For the poem, see Abū Tammām. *al-Ḥamāsa* [The Valor] (Cairo: Muḥammad 'Alī Ṣabīḥ, n.d.), I, 36.

3

On the demise of Arab–Jewish culture, see Reuven Snir, *Arab–Jewish Literature: The Birth and Demise of the Arabic Short Story* (Leiden: Brill, 2019).

4

On the status of Kattan among the Jewish–Francophone writers testifies Memmi's essay "Na'im Kattan, mon semblable, mon frère," in Jacques Allard, ed., *Na'im Kattan: l'écrivain du passage* (Montreal: Hurtubise, 2002), 91–4.

5

See Haim Blanc, *Communal Dialects in Baghdad* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1963); M. J. Jabbari, "Arabic in Iraq a Diglossic Situation," *International Journal of Applied Linguistics and English Literature* 2, no. 1 (2013): 139–50; Assaf Bār-Moshe, *The Arabic Dialect of the Jews of Baghdad: Phonology, Morphology, and Texts*. Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz Verlag, 2019); M. A. Al-Bazzaz, and S. A. Ali, "A Sociolinguistic Study of Selected Iraqi–Arabic Dialects with Reference to TV Series," *Journal of Language Studies* 3, no. 3 (2020): 68–85.

6

See Samāḥ 'Ādil, "Na'im Kattan: International Author Loaded his Novels with his Desire for Baghdad" (Arabic), *Kitābāt*, March 12, 2018, <https://kitabab.com>, accessed on November 25, 2021.

7

On the *Farhūd*, see Zvi Yehuda, *The New Babylonian Diaspora: The Rise and Fall of the Jewish Community in Iraq, 16th–20th Centuries C.E.* (Leiden: Brill, 2017), 249–81 (providing the names of the 141 Jews killed in Baghdad and the eight Jews killed in other cities).

8

'Ādil, "Na'im Kattan."

9

The novel was first published in French: Na'im Kattan, *Adieu, Babylone* (Montreal: Julliard, 1975) and appeared in 1976 in an English translation (Na'im Kattan, *Farewell, Babylon*, trans. Sheila Fischman (New York: Taplinger Publishing Company, [1976] 1980). An Arabic translation appeared only 24 years after the original book: Na'im Qaṭṭān, *Wadā'an Bābil* [Farewell, Babylon], trans. Ādam Faṭḥī (Cologne: Manshūrāt al-Jamal, 1999).

10

Kattan, *Adieu*, 184; Kattan, *Farewell*, 149; and Qaṭṭān, *Wadā'an Bābil*, 163–64.

11

Na'im Kattan, *Le réel et le théâtral* (Montreal: Editions Denoël, [1970] 1971), 166–7; English translation: Na'im Kattan, *Reality and Theatre*

(trans. Alan Brown) (Toronto: Anansi, 1972), 129-30; Arabic translation: Na'im Qaṭṭān, *al-Wāqī'ī Wa-l-Masrahī* [Reality and Theatre] (trans. Šabāḥ al-Kharrāṭ-Zuwayn) (Cologne: Manshūrāt al-Jamal, 1997), 150.

**12**

Cf. Nadia Malinovich, "Growing up in Interwar Iraq: The Memoirs of Naim Kattan and Heskell Haddad," *Journal of Jewish Identities* 12, no. 1 (2019): 30.

**13**

Kattan, *Adieu*, 57; Kattan, *Farewell*, 49; and Qaṭṭān, *Wadā'an Bābil*, 46.

**14**

The details about Kattan's literary activities in Baghdad are based on the many live presentations and journalistic interviews he gave, several of which may be watched on YouTube and others on the Internet such as *al-Nāqīd al-'Irāqī*, September 22, 2013. On Kattan and his literary works, in addition to the references mentioned below, see also Eugene Benson and William Toye, eds., *The Oxford Companion to Canadian Literature* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), 588-89; Māzin Laṭīf, *Yahūd al-'Irāq: Mawsū'a Shāmila li-Ta'rīkh Yahūd al-'Irāq wa-Shakhṣīyyātihim wa-Dawrihim fi Ta'rīkh al-'Irāq al-Ḥadīth* [The Jews of Iraq: A Comprehensive Encyclopedia to the History of Jews of Iraq, Their Personalities, and Their Role in the History of Modern Iraq] (Baghdad: Dār Mesopotamia, 2011), 231-35; Māzin Laṭīf, *Dawrat al-Qamar al-Qaṣīra li-Yahūd al-'Irāq: al-Buzūgh wa-l-Ufūl fi Ta'rīkh al-'Irāq al-Ḥadīth* [The Short Orbit of the Moon of the Jews of Iraq: The Rise and the Fall in the History of Modern Iraq] (Baghdad: Dār Mesopotamia, 2013), 97-100; Aline Schlaepfer, *Les intellectuels juifs de Bagdad (1908-1951)* (Leiden: Brill, 2016), 110-11; and Danielle Drori, "Tightrope Walkers: Jacqueline Shohet Kahanoff and Naïm Kattan as 'Translated Men,'" *Dibur: Literary Journal* 8 (2020), 43-53. See also interviews conducted with him by his son, the writer Emmanuel Kattan (b. 1968) in Emmanuel Kattan, *Naïm Kattan Entretiens* (Montreal: Boreal, 2017).

**15**

See *al-Fikr al-Ḥadīth*, issues 5-6, 7, and 8-9.

**16**

Samī Mahdī, *al-Majallāt al-'Irāqīyya al-Riyādiyya wa-Dawruhā fi Taḥdīth al-Adab wa-l-Fann 1945-1958* [The Iraqi Pioneer Periodicals and

Their Role in the Modernization of Literature and Art 1945-1958] (Baghdad: Dār al-Shu'ūn al-Thaqāfiyya al-'Āmma, 1995), 14-37.

**17**

On the impact of the *Farhūd* on Kattan, as reflected in his literary writing, see Amin Malak, "Disrupted Identity: Naim Kattan's *Farewell Babylon* and the Exile Narrative of Baghdadi Jews," *International Journal of Contemporary Iraqi Studies* 6, no. 3 (2012): 315-26; and Judith Roumani, "Mizrahi Jewish Novelists and the End of Jewish Life in the Middle East: Echoes of Voices," *Sephardic Horizons* 6, no. 2 (2022): 2.

**18**

See the interview with In'ām Kajajī (Inaam Kachachi) (b. 1952) published in *al-Sharq al-Awsaṭ*, June 5, 2003.

**19**

Danielle Laurin, "Naïm Kattan, les détours d'une vie," *Le Devoir*, April 23, 2016.

**20**

Andrew Light, "Wim Wenders's Everyday Aesthetics," in *The Aesthetics of Everyday Life*, eds. Andrew Light and Jonathan M. Smith (New York: Columbia University Press, 2005), 118.

**21**

'Ādil, "Naïm Kattan." Cf. Ljiljana Matic, "Naïm Kattan, écrivain canadien dont les héros illustrent l'identité plurivalente de leur créateur," *La Francopolophonie: langues et identités francopolifonia* (2007): 85.

**22**

Naïm Kattan, *Les villes de naissance* (Montreal: Leméac, 2001).

**23**

'Ādil, "Naïm Kattan."

**24**

Cf. Malak, "Disrupted Identity," 324

**25**

Kattan, *Le réel*; Kattan, *Reality*; and Qaṭṭān, *al-Wāqī'ī*; Naïm Kattan, "Le réel et le théâtral," *La Nouvelle Revue Française (NRF)* 191 (November 1968): 598-618.

**26**

Dahab, *Voices*, 70-78, 90. Cf. Jacques Allard, ed., *Naïm Kattan: l'écrivain du passage*, 66.

**27**

Kattan, *Le réel*, 163-181; Kattan, *Reality*, 128-42; and Qaṭṭān, *al-Wāqīʿ*, 149-65.

**28**

The same may be said even on non-Jewish authors active in Canada such as the Egyptian author Saʿd al-Khādīm (1932-2003), who founded York Press in 1974, the year after he created *The International Fiction Review* (Dahab, *Voices*, 18-19).

**29**

Kattan, *Le réel*, 181; Kattan, *Reality*, 142; and Qaṭṭān, *al-Wāqīʿ*, 165.

**30**

Linda Fasano, "Un passeur de cultures: Naïm Kattan," *Études canadiennes/Canadian Studies* 69 (2010): 87-100.

**31**

André Aciman, ed., *Letters of Transit: Reflections on Exile, Identity, Language, and Loss* (New York: New Press, 1999), 22.

**32**

Kattan, *Le réel*, 166-7; Kattan, *Reality*, Kattan, 129-30; and Qaṭṭān, *al-Wāqīʿ*, 150.

**33**

See Malak, "Disrupted Identity," 324.

**34**

Cf. Snir, *Who Needs*, especially 219-28.

**35**

*Kirkus Reviews*, January 15, 2006, 134.

**36**

*The Georgia Straight*, May 12, 2005, <https://www.straight.com/article/farewell-babylon-by-naim-kattan>, accessed on December 8, 2021.

**37**

ʿĀdil, "Naïm Kattan."

**38**

See Abū al-Ṭayyib al-Mutanabbī, *Dīwān al-Mutanabbī* [The Poetry Collection of al-Mutanabbī] (Beirut: al-Maktaba al-Thaqāfiyya, n.d.), 472.