

Al-Hur Al-Riahi: How Verse Functions in Drama

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Abstract

This study deals with Abdul Razaq Abdul Wahid's poetic play, *Al-Hur Al-Riahi* which is considered by the poet himself as his most perfect and greatest work in drama and poetry at the same time. The play is considered as one of the best poetic plays in Arabic literature as the poet diverges from the traditional frame of the Arabic poetic drama and as poetry is used dramatically in a very unique way. With Abdul Razaq Abdul Wahid, poetry is liberated from the rhyme demand and its classical function to give a musical frame to the dialogue. It becomes one of the most important techniques employed to help construct the plot in addition to many other functions such as introducing and developing the characters, and also to portray the space-time dimensions of the dramatic action.

تتناول هذه الدراسة مسرحية عبد الرزاق عبد الواحد الشعرية، الحُر الرياحي، والتي اعتبرها الشاعر نفسه أحد أعظم وأكمل أعماله مسرحاً وشعراً في الوقت نفسه. تعتبر المسرحية من أروع وأجود ما جاد به القلم المسرحي الشعري في الأدب العربي حيث يخرج الشاعر عن الإطار المألوف في المسرح الشعري العربي ويوظف الشعر بطريقة درامية فريدة من نوعها. فمع عبد الرزاق عبد الواحد، يتحرر الشعر من قيود القافية الرتيبة ووظيفته الكلاسيكية التي تنحصر في البناء الموسيقي للحوار المسرحي ويسمو ليصبح أحد أهم التقنيات التي استخدمها الشاعر لبناء الحكمة المسرحية، إضافة إلى العديد من الوظائف الأخرى مثل تقديم وتطوير الشخصيات المسرحية وكذلك وصف البعد الزمكاني للحدث الدرامي. حيث أن الشعر، برواقه الخاص وموسيقاه التي يطيب للأذن العربية تلقياً، يغني الشاعر عن السرد الطويل الممل للأحداث وإضفاء النسق التسارعي للتصاعدي للحدث البطولي والذي يكون أحد أهم عوامل نجاح العرض المسرحي التراجيدي.

A Biographical Perspective:

Unfortunately, available sources about Al-Hur do not tell us a lot about his life. Although he was considered one of the figures of the first Hijra century, the date and the place of his birth were not mentioned¹. He was probably born in Kufa in the first years of Hijra about ٦٢٥ AC. The historical sources also do not mention a lot about his early life or education; even his religion was a matter of doubt. He lived in Kufa and it is said that he was a police officer^٢.

Usually, the historians start by tracing back the ancestry of Al-Hur, stating that his grandfather was one of the highest statesmen in the state of Hira, a state held in Iraq before the coming of Islam^٣. The Sheik or the chieftain of his tribe had the right to be the king's high chancellor. So, it could be said that Al-Hur was brought up by a political family that had the power and the authority, necessary in the old Arab tribal society.^٤

It seems that Al-Hur was the chieftain of his tribe and a police officer in kufa both; moreover, he was a very famous person for his courage and nobility^٥. However, what matters most here is his stand in the conflict between Al-Hussein and Yazid, his stand in Karbala that guarantees him a great reputation and an enormous legacy in Arabic literary heritage.

After the death of the Prophet Mohammad who had the divine as well as the political authorities, it was agreed upon that the Caliphate i.e. the ruler of the Muslims, will be chosen according to a democratic way called Shura. In the time of Al-Hussein, there was a serious diversion from this procedure. Yazid did not become the ruler by Shura but by heredity and after all, historical sources affirmed that he was an immoral man. Al-Hussein, the heir of the Prophet; refused his authority. He was invited to Kufa by their people to come and to be the leader of their revolution, for they also rejected the authority of Yazid^٦.

The governor of Kufa at that time, Ibn-Ziad, was very afraid of the coming of Al-Hussein to Kufa, which by then represented the center of resistance against the regime. He chose Al-Hur to be the leader of an army that consisted of one thousand men to prevent Al-Hussein from entering the city because Ibn-Ziad knew that if Al-Hussein could arrive in the city, everything would be out of control^٧. Al-Hur accepted the mission and marched with his army to meet Al-Hussein. After he had got out of the Emir's palace, it is said that he heard a very strange voice. He might imagine that he was called from behind "O Hur, You are presaged by heaven"^٨. He turned back but he saw nobody. For him this was a great riddle because he knew that he was going to stand against the heir of the prophet and the most

righteous and honorable man on earth at that time. It seems that Al-Hur was not so much convinced by Yazid to be the ruler of Muslims but as an officer, he had a mission now, which was to prevent Al-Hussein from entering the city and turning the situation completely against the Emir.

Al-Hur marched with his army and when they met Al-Hussein, they were about to die because they were very thirsty. In extraordinary nobility from Al-Hussein, he quenched their thirst and ordered his men to water even his enemies' horses^{١٠}. It is very important to know that water was a very powerful weapon in the battles of that time and Al-Hussein could easily leave them to die but for him the goal would not justify the means. Later on, this situation will influence Al-Hur's final decision in joining Al-Hussein's army^{١١}.

Meanwhile, Al-Hur showed a paradoxical behavior towards Al-Hussein. He was sent to imprison him but at the same time he followed Al-Hussein in prayers^{١٢}. He also tried to warn Al-Hussein against rejecting the regime. Al-Hur also displayed a great amount of respect and sympathy when Al-Hussein showed him thousands of letters from the people of Kufa who asked him to come, promising that they would fight to death with him if ever he came^{١٣}.

Eventually, Al-Hur's mission was over by the arrival of the rest of the army that consisted at least of thirty thousand men. The orders given to the army were to murder Al-Hussein and send his family as captives to the Caliph in Damascus. The first thing done by Omer bin Saad, the leader of the Umayyad army was to prevent Al-Hussein's army from reaching water that was very near^{١٤}. This situation left a heavy impact on Al-Hur as he remembered how Al-Hussein saved him and all the men who were with him from death; and, moreover, supplied his opponents with water that he was keeping for his family. In fact, this represented a moral shock that awakened Al-Hur's inner world.

Al-Hur did not believe that the army was coming to kill Al-Hussein until he asked the leader who affirmed that the orders were given to do so^{١٥}. Al-Hur was haunted by guilt feeling because he believed that he was the cause of the current situation, for he participated in preventing Al-Hussein from going to any place until the army arrived. It was the feeling that helped Al-Hur to make his final decision, for he could simply have no side in that battle. He could have easily gone away, pretending that nothing was happening but the guilt feeling made him realize that his duty was to fight with Al-Hussein, although he did not send him any letter.

Although Al-Hur did not know that Ibn-Ziad had the intention to kill Al-Hussein, and that was very clear in his behavior with Al-Hussein and also his question to Omer Bin Saad "Are you fighting this man?!"^{١٦}, he saw himself accomplice in the crime that would happen. Now, he should pay penance for what he had done and there was only one way to do that. He should be with the righteous side in this conflict even it would cost him his life. He should have gone to Al-Hussein and apologized and repented, but would Al-Hussein accept his apology?

He came with his son to Al-Hussein. He made an oath that he did not know about the real intention of the Emir and if he had known, he would not have accepted to lead the army that imprisoned him. Al-Hussein accepted his apology and asked him to get down from his horse but he replied by saying: "I am better for you as a knight".^{١٧} He could have simply said that Al-Hussein accepted his apology and now he would have left home but he decided to defend with the righteous party and that was what made him one of the great men who proved that human beings certainly had the ability to choose their fates.

Dramatic Perspectives:

In order to have a better understanding of figures like Becket and Al-Hur, one should believe that they do not specifically belong to a certain religion or nation; for they are, indeed, universal figures. They are like Jesus, Al-Hussein, The Baptist, Guevara, and many other universal figures. Their universality derives from the fact that they suffer and die for the sake of all humanity and not only for the people of their religion or nation. Abdul Razaq Abdul Wahid clearly has this idea in mind when he has written this play, for he introduces many famous figures in his play as he wants to establish a link between those characters, affirming that they almost have same objectives; truth, faith, and freedom for humanity.

In general, the play consists of three acts. The first one deals with Al-Hur and his tough experience to take a side in the battle between Al-Hussein and Yazid. The second act is mainly devoted to Al-Hur's foil and opponent, Al-Shimr, who decides to be with Yazid. In act three, the characters, the time, the place, and even the plot are all symbolic and not real; as the act portrays the different attitudes towards Al-Hussein in different times and places.

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From the very beginning of the play, Abdul-Razaq Abdul-Wahid tries to create an atmosphere of silence and of breathlessness that reminds us of the first words that are said by the chorus in *Murder in the Cathedral*. There is no time to say a lot of words as this is the time of taking decisions and not of speaking; Al-Hur reflects:

That's the moment of silence:
Let your words condense themselves
Retreat?
Or else you are now dead?
Which of your ways is safer?^{١٧}

It is clear that Al-Hur has only two ways: he either retreats or he gets murdered. Like *Murder in the Cathedral*, the play focuses on dramatizing the greatest moment in the life of The hero which is the moment of taking decision. Thus, the main conflict in the play is an internal one^{١٨}. To reflect this inner conflict, the playwright employs functional dramatic techniques to achieve his aim effectively: as early as the first lines, for instance, he introduces the Voice.

The Voice is so significant to the dramatic structure of the play. It provides a very shocking opening that splendidly arouses suspense and tension among the audience. It also invites them to wonder; why Al-Hur has only two choices.

The following lines of the Voice clearly show the inner conflict of the hero as if the Voice were challenging Al-Hur:

O Hur! yourself you deceive:
You own the sword,
But the hilt is at another's hand. (Act I, ٢٦)

The playwright's poetic skills allow him to hasten the tone of the play by portraying the meeting of the hero with his leaders in a very effective way. The image of the bleeding night tells us the time of this meeting and it also affirms that there is no much of time for Al-Hur to take his decision:

Then what?
Your army is now on horsebacks,
Your leaders are coming,
The night still bleeds
Inside your ribs, no ray of light ever grows
And the night still bleeds,
And the night still bleeds, (Act I, ٢٨)

The Voice represents the moral side which is found in each one of us. Psychologically speaking, it is the super ego of the hero that continuously invites him to confront the immediate problem and not to run away:

Here you are; you flee from yourself,
What's the value of that you now confide them:
The distance between them and Al-Hussein,
As thou know not the distance between you and Al-Hussein? (Act I, ٢٩)

Now the words are of a very great importance not only for the protagonist himself but also for the rest of his thousand men:

Every word you utter now
Is a sword. (Act I, ٣٠)

The leaders are discussing the current situation with Al-Hur who seems very hesitant and confounded because of the repeated sounds that he has heard (without being heard from the leaders). Eventually, he

breaks the silence and speaks the bitter truth:

You want me to lead my men to kill Al-Hussein
I will do
But.....
To have them kill him,
They should believe that he whose horses gallop
On his forehead.
And that whom they dare to murder
Have their arrows pierce
is not Al-Hussein,
But a man
Falsely so presume
Betraying people
To their destruction, Tomorrow
I'll let them certain of his unbelonging to Muhammad. (Act I, ٤١)

This could be the self-recognition scene in which the hero recognizes his sins; thus, he identifies himself with the hound which is set by his owner to catch the prey:

But I am just like you,
A hound breathless chases his prey. (Act I, ٤٣)

The conversation goes on between Al-Hur and his leaders who also realize the danger of the situation. Abu-Hafs, one of the leaders, is daring enough to declare the truth. He alleges that if he turns the desert into water, his leader will not drink a drop. It is a very witty metaphor, as Al-Hur certainly knows the righteous side but he pretends to be ignorant by asking his leaders. Thus, Abu-Hafs affirms:

I swear if I turned the whole desert into water,
And the flood covered you up to the ears,
You would close your lips inside,
Till you would have died thirsty! (Act I, ٤٥-٤٦)
And he continues, giving the solution according to his opinion:
To say:
We shan't fight Al-Hussein
And you add no single word. (Act I, ٤٦)

The reference to the water and thirst, as well as flood is apparently recurrent throughout the course of the play. Historically, there is a very great significance to water and thirst in determining the relationship between Al-Hussein and Al-Hur. When he marched with his thousand men into the depth of the desert to meet Al-Hussein and prevent him from entering the city of Kufa, they were thirsty to death and it was Al-Hussein who saved them from death; and when the rest of the army which consisted at least of thirty thousand reached to fight Al-Hussein, they used the weapon of thirst to force Al-Hussein to yield. That situation plays a crucial part in arousing the inner moral conflict to its peak inside Al-Hur. He remembers the noble behavior of Al-Hussein and how he rescued them from death. He compares

Al-Hussein's attitude and his nobility even with his enemies with the brutality and the savagery of Yazid's army who deprives Al-Hussein and his children from water. It is important to note here that Al-Hussein is slaughtered thirsty. The reference to water becomes one of the most important motifs in the play. There are two senses of water in the play: first, the playwright means the real physical water; besides, there exists a metaphorical meaning of water. It could stand for many things such as good, truth, and sacrifice. It takes a metaphorical meaning in the sense that inside each one of us, there is an austere thirst for goodness and nobility. Thus, the challenge becomes great and the conflict raises more. At this moment, Al-Hur is being accused of a very dangerous charge. Abu-Hafs tells Al-Hur that the matter is too simple to be solved and he summarizes it by saying that you should say that we should not fight Al-Hussein and add nothing. But taking such decision is not an easy matter as the Voice tells Al-Hur:

You lie!
Your cowardness masters you,

Since yesterday; you've been fighting yourself. (Act I, ٤٤)

At this difficult moment, Abdul-Razaq Abdul-Wahid introduces Al-Hur's son, Hareth. He comes to his father to tell him about a very strange experience in which he hears his mother's voice. He recognizes the voice of his mother and then her face appears on the stage. She comes to warn her husband and her son against fighting Al-Hussein:

Oh, my son!

Oh, my son!

Oh, my son!

I know, after this night; I will see you no more,

Neither shall I see your father.

If it were for all water to diminish,

And for this blood to bleed.

Do not be, thou, the sword it hits.

Do not be, thou, the sand it drinks. (Act I, ٥١-٥٢)

In this speech, there is another reference to water. The surface meaning of water here is the real physical water. The second meaning is the metaphorical one in which water stands for goodness and rightness and the drinking has a negative meaning as it is performed by an inanimate being and not a human being so water which could also be a symbol for life and fertility would be wasted in the sands of the barren desert.

The appearance of Al-Hur's wife raises the level of the tension and also hastens the tempo of the play. Afterwards, the audience is surprised by an unexpected voice. It comes off-stage, and said by an invisible caller:

Al-Hussein will be killed; and this sign will stay,

All the swords smeared by his blood,

All the sand that drinks from his blood,

Crimson, to the doomsday will be red

Crimson, to the doomsday will be red (Act I, ٥٢)

One cannot be quite sure in identifying this invisible caller; he could be Al-Hur's conscience that makes such yell. However, the important thing is not the identity of the caller but the message delivered by this caller. First of all, he states that Al-Hussein would be killed but at the same time he emphasizes the very fact that Al-Hussein is not an ordinary man. The caller affirms that when Al-Hussein would be killed, his cause and his last stand; in one word, would be universal. Al-Hussein is transformed into a freedom fighter; into one of those persons who change the future of not only their nations but the future of the world in general. Thus, if Al-Hur fights him, he will be a damned person to the doomsday but if someone stands on Al-Hussein's side, he will be an immortal person.

The invisible caller paves the way for the appearance of three characters: Jesus Christ, John the Baptist, and Che Guevara. All of those people in addition to Al-Hussein could be categorized as freedom fighters, blissful martyrs and most important of all universal heroes whose accomplishments exceed the boundaries of place and time. What is common between them is that each one of those characters prefers death to giving up his belief and by this; they gain their universality, regardless of their nationality or religion.

At the beginning, Jesus appears on the stage saying:

Because I divide my flesh among people,

Because I bear their sufferings,

Because I am called by my name. (Act I, ٥٤)

He affirms that suffering is not only necessary in making the change but it is also the feature of the great heroes who make the great changes in this world.

Then, Che Guevara comes on, summarizing his experience in this life by saying:

Because the distance between the bullet and the heart is too narrow. Because what blocks the path between the murdered and the murderer is a witness and a murdered
I become at my time the impossible witness. (Act I, ٥٤)

It should be noticed that the speeches of Jesus and Guevara enriches the rhythm of the play with diversity and makes it runs briskly; besides, the meaning of what they have said would be accumulated by the lines said by John the Baptist:

Cursed be that who holds the murdered's bole to the murderer
Cursed be that who deceives a man of his eyes or of his hands. (Act I, ٥٤)

Thus, Al-Hur's reaction shows the effect of the message delivered by Jesus, Guevara, and the Baptist:
No! You won't be a ladder, Hur!

You won't behead the Baptist again,
And you won't hang Jesus. (Act I, ٥٦)

The first act ends with Al-Hur's determined stand not to behead 'the Baptist' again, as a clear reference to Al-Hussein. The expected beginning of the second act is to pursue the story of Al-Hur and to witness his reaction that determines his fate, but the audience is completely shocked by the opening scene of Act II that dramatizes another story with different characters. The central figure of the second act is Al-Shimr. Historically, Al-Shimr is the person who kills Imam Hussein. He is one of the military leaders and is also the chieftain of a very strong tribe. He is also extremely loyal to the Umayyad and his hatred to Imam Ali and his sons is something often acknowledged.

As in the case of Al-Hur; there is a heavy emphasis in act two on showing what is inside Al-Shimr's. Therefore, the voice and the premonition are introduced from the very beginning of this act and Abdul Razaq Abdul Wahid differentiates between them before the beginning of the act when he mentions the dramatic persona. It should be noted here that the following events have happen a month after the murder of Al-Hussein:

When you came back a month ago
And as you ordered,
We sent spies among people. (Act II, ٦٣)

Recalling the events now, Al-Shimr undergoes a state of restlessness and alienation because of his past experiences. He hears the voices of his victims and the mourns of their women and children and he sees their eyes and this makes him lives in an endless state of suffering, that leads him to say things that seem to his companions mere hallucinations:

All your voices,
All your mourns,
All your eyes
Besiege me,
O, eyes; show me your faces that I can't see but their sockets. (Act II, ٦٨)

Al-Shimr's companion, Malik tells him that what he sees and hears is nothing more than the creation of his own imagination. As a soldier Al-Shimr used to cut many heads but this time is completely different as Malik notes. It is a shameful thing that such a leader is besieged as such, and is shown in the terrible state that Malik describes, but Al-Shimr's reply is dramatically expressive:

O Malik! O Malik! O Malik!
You gibe me by fear?!
Keep death afore me; a thousand headed serpent,
Now I fight;
An army as many as stones,
I dash it. (Act II, ٧٠)

Suhail, another companion of Al-Shimr, tries to comfort him, telling him that a month passes away and Al-Hussein is dead now but Al-Shimr answers him:

He's here Suhail,
He is here,
Whilst I am talking to you about him,
Off him I busy myself by him. (Act II, ٧٢)

Thus, in the two acts; the main figure is Al-Hussein; though dramaturgically, he is not on the stage.

Most of people know about the crime committed by Al-Shimr; therefore, they neither wish to visit him nor to speak with him. This is quite difficult on Al-Shimr especially if one keeps in mind the fact that he is the chieftain of a very strong tribe before he has become a military leader:

A month gone, and none comes near

A month gone, and this door is knocked

Only by the hands of wind. (Act II, ٧٤)

Meanwhile a strange visitor knocks at the door. It seems that he is only a vagrant and he does not know the identity of the house owner. He enters the house and waits for the hospitality of Al-Shimr and his companions. Al-Shimr keeps talking about his crimes and the way by which he kills Al-Hussein. He describes his feelings at that moment, stating that it is neither pride nor anything else that motivates him, except his own fear:

No!

It wasn't pride;

I remember it.

I was sweating fear,

That my fear was able to

Slaughter the whole earth. (Act II, ٧٥)

It is not only Al-Shimr who was frightened but all the rest of his army as he continues:

And I carried all their apprehensions;?!

One man bearing the fear of thirty thousands

And carried the cowardice of thirty thousands,

And by this, I killed. (Act II, ٧٦)

At this point, the guest realizes that he is in the house of the person who has killed the grandson of Prophet Mohammad. Al-Shimr's servant brings some water to the old man but the latter refuses to drink. Once again there is another reference to the water which has become the most important and the most recurrent motif in the play. Al-Shimr who deprives Al-Hussein and his children from water is now begging this guest to drink from his water, but the Sheik keeps refusing. He does not believe that Al-Shimr insists that he should drink the water; therefore, Al-Shimr says:

What could one like me do?

Should I carry the Euphrates on my back?

Wandering among people,

Calling:

Oh! people! do Al-Shimr a favor,

He's coming with the Euphrates on his back? (Act II, ٨٠-٨١)

One can interpret Al-Shimr's speech in two ways: the first one is to consider that he is a regretful man and he is now seeking repentance; and the second way is to regard him as a very selfish man and he says these words only to relieve himself from suffering and this seems to be more appropriate.

The old man refuses to drink water and also refuses to spend this night at Al-Shimr's house. Finally, Al-Shimr asks him about his thirst and he replies:

As if I were filled with water

As if I were filled with water (Act II, ٨٣)

The water here represents a spiritual righteousness and the spontaneous human desire for goodness and rightness.

After the Sheik decides to leave, he turns his face and says "Do you know what happens to the Euphrates O Shimr?" (Act II, ٨٤) Abdul Razaq Abdul Wahid starts to describe the river in a very symbolic way. In a very impressive personification, he portrays the river as a wanderer that is walking at nights, calling:

Voice: Oh sleepers!

Here I am the Euphrates;

The desert of thirst;

Blood are my sediments

Blood in my foam

And you are all water. (Act II, ٨٤)

There is a sort of assimilation between the Euphrates and Al-Shimr. Both of them are wanderers who

suffer from a disastrous guilt. The Euphrates is just like a ghost who looks for survival; not through revenge as we have in the Elizabethan plays but through apology to Al-Hussein, asking him:

May you, for my water, grant a part in your next water?

May you, for my past, grant a part in your next water? (Act II, ٨٥)

Malik blames Al-Shimr for he lets such a vagrant just like the old man to insult him like that. Al-Shimr replies in a very exclamatory tone "do you call this a vagrant!" and at once he remembers Al-Hur and simultaneously there opens a sideward scene in which the voice of the battle could be heard and the characters are Al-Hur, Abu Hafs and others. The scene opens by a conversation between Al-Hur and Abu Hafs who tells Al-Hur that it is not enough that he takes no side in this battle. He tries to convince Al-Hur that he is not responsible for what would happen to Al-Hussein. Actually, as we have in *Murder in the Cathedral* in the case of the Tempters; Abu Hafs is Al-Hur's Tempter who tries to prevent him from joining Al-Hussein, telling him that it is better to take no side in this battle.

Al-Hur overcomes this temptation by his own reasoning. He tells Abu Hafs that he has the greatest responsibility for what would happen to Al-Hussein because he was the first one who has forsaken him and extradited him to the Umayyad Army as if he was a criminal. Therefore, he is blaming himself now for what he has done and he is coming to Al-Hussein for repentance.

In this scene, there is another reference to water. In this context, it becomes a symbol for Imam Hussein and the cause that he strives for. One of the Umayyad army asks Al-Hur "are you repentant Hur?" He replies by saying "I am repentant because at the morning I was the thirstiest being among the creatures of God and I have seen the water but I didn't drink." (Act II, ٩٠) Al-Hur considers his life a debt that he should pay for Al-Hussein and his right cause.

Before Al-Hur leaves, Abu Hafs stops him and gives him some water because he is so thirsty but Al-Hur refuses, saying that:

Al-Hussein is water.....Al-Hussein is water

Al-Hussein is water. (Act II, ٩٢)

In a previous dialogue with some soldiers of the Umayyad army, Al-Hur states that he is repentant because he saw water and he did not drink. In that context, he refers indirectly to Al-Hussein but in the above quotation, he declares plainly that Imam Hussein is water and he is going to drink from that water. He goes to join the convoy of Al-Hussein who waters him from the cup of immortality.

The insertion of this scene, that depicts Al-Hur's repentance into the second act while it should be introduced in the first act, makes the play more dynamic by raising the level of tension. Abdul Wahid constructs the play in a way that enables him to break the routine and surprise the audience. He delays the scene of Al-Hur's repentance that represents the climax of the play and incorporates it within another story; it is the story of Al-Hur's antithesis, Al-Shimr who also has the ability to repent but he chooses wrong. Thus, the playwright wants to say that human beings are free and the choice they take determines their fates. He succeeds in dramatizing this idea by making a strong link between Al-Hur and Al-Shimr. The first represents the human ability to elevate and sublime while the second stands for an absolute evilness that could rarely be found in this world.

Al-Shimr absolute evilness could best be showed in the next scene. He narrates to Malik what he keeps as secret for a month. He wants to free himself from that moment as he states. It is the moment at which he kills Al-Hussein. Al-Shimr describes Al-Hussein by saying:

Never have I seen a protest like his eyes

For a moment;.... we were none but two:

A frightened murderer,

And a murdered chasing him;

Just eyes! (Act II, ٩٧-٩٨)

Malik asks Al-Shimr if Al-Hussein utters any word. The only word uttered by Al-Hussein is "why" that starts to echo and becomes louder and louder. Al-Shimr's answer shows his real character, he simply says "like this" with a lot of underestimation. Then, he continues:

I said:

You are a burden of purity,

The earth hates,

For you expose her

My dilemma with you is much greater than yours.

I am whose bad luck decides

To be afflicted by whipping out all the nobility

From the face of earth (Act II, ٩٩) Al-Shimr affirms that he has no personal enmity with Al-Hussein but he has problem with purity and nobility.

Al-Shimr craves after gold that Yazid would give to the one who brings Al-Hussein's head. At last, Al-Shimr loses this life and the other life as Yazid gives him nothing but banishment and deprivation; he keeps laughing in a hysteric way:

Yazid has loaded me with gold

Yazid has loaded me with gold (Act II, ١٠٤)

Then his laugh changes into mourning:

Yazid has loaded me with crime and poverty

Yazid has loaded me with crime and poverty

Dismissed like the mangy camel. (Act II, ١٠٤) This might tell us the reason behind Al-Shimr's suffering, as he does not show any sign of regret or grief for what he has done but he only feels sorry for himself as he does not get what he wished to get. The story of Al-Shimr with Yazid could be considered a play within play. It is of a great importance as it reflects Al-Shimr's punishment and it also represents the first view of suffering, discussed in the first chapter. The third act of the play could be considered a play in itself. The time and the setting of this act are quite symbolic. When he introduces the act, Abdul-Razaq Abdul Wahid refers to the time as: "The present time" and to the place as: "Kufa, any place where people can gather" and he mentions nothing about the characters. Actually, the playwright introduces more allegorical characters than real ones as he does not treat the characters as real human beings. Each one of the characters reflects a single trait and shows no development except one or two characters.

The act opens by the speech of the chorus:

The water differs

The faces and the names differ

But just like the bucket of the waterwheel

They become similar when they turn

They overlap when they turn (Act III, ١٠٩)

It might be very beneficial to remember the image of the wheel that Eliot introduces in *Murder in the cathedral* to understand the image of the waterwheel which is heavily emphasized by Abdul Razaq Abdul Wahid. The intention of both images is one thing; that is to say, history simply repeats itself. The appearance of Jesus immediately after the chorus confirms the idea of repetition of history. Jesus appears three times on the stage; first he appears crucified; second he appears strung up; and finally shot. This implies that Jesus is murdered again and again and this will continue all the time. It is the doctrine of Jesus in liberating people which is murdered repeatedly.

The chorus elaborates this idea; stating that each time has its own martyrs regardless of name, nation, or religion; their task is to stun the human conscience throughout their own sufferings and sacrifices:

Each time bears its murdered,

Each time buries its murdered,

Fate begots the times

And Death begots Man

But Fear

Begots the flood

But Fear

Begots the flood. (Act III, ١١١)

This speech also enhances the reference to flood. The water in the first two acts becomes the flood in the third act and it will be emphasized again and again in this act.

The chorus disappears and Ammar enters. The playwright shows what happens in Kufa after thousand years from the murder of Al-Hussein and we should suppose that now we witness a new coming of Al-Hussein. Ammar addresses the crowd saying:

O people of Kufa,

For a thousand years, you bite your fingers for remorse,

For a thousand years, and your athirst raises the cup.

Seeing a line of blood in the water

A thousand,

You pen on the heads,

On the backs,
And on the chests
The history of your ancestors
And you say would that:
And you say if not
And if we.....

Here is him now if you are believers. (Act III, ١١٢-١١٣)

He tells them that Al-Hussein's messenger is at doors to take their homage to Al-Hussein. The same conspiracy that occurs before thousand years is happening now. The mob, that were competing to give their homage, run away except three poor men. The conspirators are Rashid, a police officer, and Hareth. They keep doing what they used to do for thousand years ago. Hareth and according to his role would extradite Al-Hussein's messenger to Rashid to kill him. He is just like Al-Hur and Al-Shimr in the sense that he experiences the same conflict to be with Al-Hussein or not:

By then Rashid,
When your soldiers besieged my house a thousand years ago,
As early as the beginning of night
I was holding a scale to raise:
You and prosperous life on a side:
And Al-Hussein's messenger and death on the other.
And the hand of Fear was trembling in between,
While it was lifting its scale. (Act III, ١٣١)

Rashid and Hareth regard what they are doing as a play and each one of them has his own specific role in this play. Hareth is about to rebel and change his own role. There occurs a conversation between Hareth and Rashid that is similar to the conversation that happens between Al-Shimr and Malik in act II. As Al-Shimr remembers the murder of his antithesis, Al-Hur, Hareth also remembers his antithesis Yasser, the man who dies with his family defending another messenger of Al-Hussein.

As Hareth remembers Yasser, there opens a subsidiary scene that portrays the death of Yasser, his wife Aisha, and his son Sulaim. The mother asks her husband to open the gate of the house in order to find their son who was sent by his father to Ammar. Simultaneously, they hear Sulaim asking their help behind the door as he is captured by Rashid and his soldiers. The soldiers bargain with Yasser on the life of his son: If he gives them all the supporters of Imam Hussein who have sheltered in his house, they will give him his son. Aisha as a mother asks Yasser to open the door:

His life depends on this door oh Yasser;
He lives if I open this door oh Yasser;
He lives..... (Act III, ١٣٨)

And Yasser replies:

He lives! ... no,
But he is rescued from Death
To die thousand times a day (Act III, ١٣٨)

Yasser does not want his son to be just like Hareth who is now wishing death. He should suffer at this moment as his father affirms:

Aisha,
He is suffering in a moment
A moment then he keeps quite

Then the voice is his to the doomsday. (Act III, ١٣٩)

After that we know from Rashid that Yasser and his family as well as the rest of Al-Hussein's supporter are dead now. He tells Hareth that he should feel happy as he did not lose his life at that day but Hareth disagrees with him:

We're all dead afterwards,
We're all dead afterwards.
The difference between us is that
It takes me thousand years to defeat my fear

Whilst Yasser did it in a moment. (Act III, ١٤٤) The next scene is quite symbolic in reflecting the universality and the human side in the issue that is explored by Abdul Razaq Abdul Wahid in this play. It should be noted that the first character who appears in this act is Jesus Christ and now John the Baptist

would appear. He is wandering with his boy without a head in a very long journey to find his own head. It is impossible to imagine a man walking without his head but as it is with Jesus, Che Guevara and Al-Hussein; what is important is not the physical existence of those characters but what they stand for in a sense that they represent the moral values that are greater than any existence in this world. As if the moral values and the human desire for freewill which is wandering in our time without a head. At this moment, the Baptist starts to doubt the advantage of his journey:

Sometimes; O my son

I ask myself:

What is the benefit of seeking your head John?

Every year passes, and

I more believe that if my head's restored to my neck,

I will lose it within a day and a night. (Act III, ١٤٨) The Baptist decides to continue searching between the bodies and he gets out with his boy. Then, Al-Shimr appears on the stage again but this time dressed as a modern man. He is searching for Al-Hussein to kill him. He is addressing the audience directly, questioning them about the reason of their ignorance of his identity. A young man from the audience stands on the stage to argue with him about his ability to kill Al-Hussein. Al-Shimr is quite surprised that this young man does not fear him. The young man challenges Al-Shimr in a very daring and metaphorical way that shows the great influence and the tremendous change that Al-Hussein has made in people's life. He tells Al-Shimr that there is only one way to kill Al-Hussein, which is to slaughter all the palm trees that are found in Iraq; after that he should also slaughter the Euphrates.

As a result, it is impossible for Al-Shimr to kill Al-Hussein as he is transformed into an intangible value that motivates human beings to resist the tyrants and fight for freedom. This idea is further clarified in the final scene of the play. The scene is described by the boy who is asked by the Baptist to describe what is going on. He sees a lot of people who are just like the Baptist himself walking without heads. The people gather around heaps of heads and each one of them takes one for himself to put it on his own neck and after that they continue moving towards a banner. The color of this banner is dark as sand and it is red as sand and it is white as sand. Around this banner, the human bodies become like flood. The Baptist asks his boy to bring one of the heads affirming that:

This is all my head

Hasten before it is too late,

I got it.....

I got it.....

Then you got the beginning of the flood, John!

Then you got the beginning of the flood, John.... (Act III, ١٥٧)

Abdul Razaq Abdul Wahid ends the play by this powerful message; the flood that would bring change to this world is coming. The new world that he is dreaming of is not the creation of his own imagination but it is a world that humanity must suffer bitterly in order to create it.

Although the play is named Al-Hur; the main focus of the play is not the figure of Al-Hur. The first act is clearly devoted to deal with Al-Hur but the second act deals with his antithesis Al-Shimr and the final act tackles characters living in modern age in a highly symbolic language. The main concern of the play is Al-Hussein not Al-Hur, and although he never appears on the stage but his spirit haunts all the details of the play. Indeed, what matter is not Al-Hussein as an individual but what he stands for, as he is transformed into a conceptual value that reminds human beings of one important thing: suffering might be the only way to achieve the freedom of Man. The playwright introduces us two examples: Al-Hur and Al-Shimr. Both of them are put in the same situation that is to decide to be with or against Al-Hussein. Act I mainly depicts Al-Hur's experience of conflict. He struggles amidst two choices: he either chooses the prosperous life and the big titles that Yazid would give him if he kills Al-Hussein, or to stand with the righteous side which simply means death.

Al-Hur understands that his salvation lies in his physical suffering and nothing else. This is the crucial thing that Al-Shimr never comprehends even after we see him suffer in the second act. His bitter suffering is never to be understood as a sign of regret or repentance as he appears in the final act seeking Al-Hussein to kill him again. Yasser and Hareth undergo the same experience of conflict and suffering in the third act. The first succeeds, just like Al-Hur, in the test and he gets his own salvation. On the contrary, we have Hareth who takes thousand years to overcome his own fear and comprehend what Yasser comprehends in a moment; but after all he is better than Al-Shimr who does not change his

attitude and he would never do.

In a televised interview, Abdul Razaq Abdul Wahid states that *Al-Hur Al-Riahi* is the most perfect and gigantic work that he has ever written. It is a great testimony for the play that one of the great critics wrote a comparative study to compare between *Al-Hur* and *Macbeth* concluding that *Al-Hur* exceeds *Macbeth* by many stages. However, it is not an easy judgment to be taken but it is certain that the play is the most perfect among the works of Abdul Razaq Abdul Wahid.^{١٩} He has a good experience in writing dramatic works before he wrote *Al-Hur Al-Riahi*. For example, in his long poem "Al-Mussadara"; he adopts many dramatic techniques such the dialogue and the interior monologue. In this poem, he succeeds in creating a powerful conflict between the hero and the other characters as if he writes a play and not a poem. Mohsen Itemish states that: The poem comes as a good representation of the long poems that present the contradicted situations in perfect and dynamic action. The conflict is quite sharp and direct between the hero on one the hand and all the other characters of the poem on the other hand.^{٢٠} He gives up the dialogue and uses the interior monologue when the hero turns to himself as he recollects his past experience and what he suffers in the war shows the skill of the poet and his mastery of the dramatic techniques. Thus Mohsen Itemish concludes that:

Abdul Razaq Abdul Wahid brilliantly adopts the dramatic techniques in his poem such as the creation of a well developed plot and the distinctive characters with all dramatic features and situations throughout conflict and contradiction. The poem is also unique in adopting the dialogue that dominates most of the scenes of the poem as it also turns to be the main mean of expression to be unified with the main action itself.^{٢١}

Al-Hur Al-Riahi is a poetic play that is different from many other plays that are poetic only by name. Many writers like Ahmed Shawqy and Abdul Jabbar Al-Sharqawy tried to compose plays in a poetic form but really they know less about the dramatic art as they were poets and not dramatists.^{٢٢} Being a great poet was very beneficial for Abdul Razaq Abdul Wahid as a dramatist as he understands the real connection between poetry and drama and how for a play to be really poetic. A play would not be simply poetic if the playwright decided to write the play in verse and provided a list of poetic devices throughout the play as he may write good poetry but not necessarily good drama.

A play would be really poetic if the playwright uses the poetic techniques to serve dramatic functions; for example in *Al-Hur Al-Riahi* Abdul Wahid uses many similes and metaphors not for the sake of showing his poetic excellence but for developing characters for example or to develop the plot of the play. Abdul Wahid alleges that he creates the dramatic line in Arabic poetry and he really does. His brilliant poetic play *The Epic of Voice* was translated to French by JadBerk and made a shock among the literary circles in the Sorbonne.^{٢٣} The greatness of the *Al-Hur Al-Riahi* also comes from its subject matter. Abdul Razaq Abdul Wahid has a special relationship with Al-Hussein. He said that he is speaking with Al-Hussein in most of his works that have the rejecting and the rebellious spirit as Al-Hussein represents for him the typical hero that he wants to die just like him. The secret of this relationship is the heavy impact of Al-Hussein on the making of the poet in his childhood as he was watching the spontaneous plays that portray the murder of Al-Hussein. Each one of us will certainly die but there is a difference between who catches his death and who is caught by death. Thus, Abdul Wahid sums up *Al-Hur Al-Riahi* by saying that it is about someone who is chasing his death and he finally catches it. He is exactly just like Thomas Becket who achieves his glory throughout his death.^{٢٤}

Notes

^١ Mohammad bin Jareer Al-Tabary, *Tarikh Al-Tabary (History of Tabary)* (Beirut: The Scientific Books House, ١٩٩٥) ٤/٣٢١

^٢ Mohsen Al-Amin, *Aian Al-Shia (Figures of Shia)* (Beirut: Al-Ta'aruf House for Publishing, ١٩٨٦), ٤/٢٣٤

^٣ It could be said that there is an agreement between all Muslim historians about this point.

^٤ Mohammad bin Taher Al-Samawy, *Ebsar Al-Ain Fi Ansar Al-Hussein (The Eye Seeing in The Supporters of Al-Hussein)* (Najaf: Al-Heidaria Press, ١٩٢١) ٢٠٣

^٥ Ni'ema Al-Samawy, *Mawsu'ate Al-Thawra Al-Husseini (The Encyclopedia of The Hussein Revolution)* (Beirut: Al-Murtaza House, ٢٠٠١) ٥/١١٧

^٦ Mohammad bin Abdul-Hady, *Al-Qaul Al-Sadeed fi Sirate Al-Hussein Al-Shaheed (The Proper Say in The Biography of Al-Hussein the Martyr)* (Kuwait: The Charity of the Family and the Companions, ٢٠١٠). ٩٤

^٧ Ibid. ١١١

^٨ Ibn Nama Al-Hilli, *Mutheer Al-Ahzan (Sadness Rouser)* (Beirut: Sciences House, ٢٠٠٤) ٥٩-٦٠.

^٩ Ibid. ٦٣

^{١٠} Abu-Mukhnif, *Makhtal Al-Hussein (Murder of Al-Hussein)*, <http://www.shiaweb.org/ahl-albayt/al-hussain/maqtal/index.html>, accessed on ١٠/٢٠١٢, ١/١٨٣

^{١١} Ibid. ١٨٩

^{١٢} Ibn-Ala'atheer, *Al-Kamel fi Al-Tareekh (The Perfect in History)*, (The Scientific Books House, ١٩٨٦) <http://www.waqfeya.com/book.php?bid=١١٠٦>, accessed on ١٢/٦/٢٠١٢, ٤/٦٤

^{١٣} Mohammad Ali bin Shahrashub, *Manakib A'al-Abi-Taleb (The Virtues of the Talebs)* <http://shiaonlineibrary.com>, accessed on ١٠/٢٠١٢, ٣/٢٥.

^{١٤} Ibid. ٢٥١

^{١٥} Al-Mwafaq bin Ahmed Al-Khawarizmy, *Maqtal Al-Hussein (Murder of Al-Hussein)*, (Qum: The Guidance Lights House, ١٩٩٧) ٧٢

^{١٦} Ibid. ٧٥

^{١٧} Abdul Razaq Abdul Wahid, *Al-Hur Al-Riahi: a Poetic Play in Three Acts*, fourth edition, ٢١. <http://www.abdulrazaqabdulwahid.net> (Accessed on ١٢-٥-٢٠١١). Henceforth, all references to the play are taken from this edition. Page numbers are parenthetically cited with act numbers within the text. All the translations of the text into English are the researcher's unless otherwise stated.

^{١٨} Jabra Ibrahim Jabra, Introduction to *Al-Hur Al-Riahi: a Poetic Play in Three Chapters*, fourth edition, <http://www.abdulrazaqabdulwahid.net> (Accessed on ١٢-٥-٢٠١١).

^{١٩} http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_XJkg^uyVzY interview, (Accessed on: ١٢-٣-٢٠١٢).

^{٢٠} Mohsen Itemish, *Dair Al-Mallak* (Baghdad: The Public Cultural House, ١٩٨٦) ٨٨.

^{٢١} Ibid., ٩٣.

^{٢٢} Many critics have made such judgment on the figures of the first generation who write poetic plays such as Ahmed Shawki for example and how their writings differ from the writings of the second generation such as Sallah Abdul Sabour and Abdul Razaq Abdul Wahid. More information about this idea is found in: Ahmed Shamsuldin Al-Hajajy, *The Poetic Drama in Modern Arabic Literature* (Damascus: The University Press, ١٩٩٥) ٥١.

^{٢٣} <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HnG^RPV^gik>, (accessed on: ٥-٨-٢٠١٢).

^{٢٤} Ibid.

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