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*Shelley's Influence on Al-Mazini and Taha*

Asst. Prof. Abdul-Jabbar Jassim Mohammed\* &  
Muyasar Qasim Thanoon\*\*

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### *Introduction*

In the beginning of the twentieth century, various Arab poets began responding impressively to a new literary movement in writing poetry. It is romanticism which rather presents a sort of revolution in spite of its late arrival to the Arab World.

In this research, a historical descriptive account of this movement is presented including the impact of the English poet P. B. Shelley (1792-1822) on two main poets Abdel-Qadir Al-Mazini (1890-1949), and Ali Mahmood Taha (1902-1949).

This paper also gives a full account of how some Arab poets try to build a new literary stage and how translation affects certain artistic movements including poetry.

Aspects and examples of similarities and differences are well demonstrated. In other words, Al-Mazini and Taha are obviously indebted to Shelley, one of the best representatives of the English romantic poetry.

One should think that Arabic poetry was governed by various classic rules or some linguistic aspects as it is nowadays compared to English poetry. The Arab poet, for

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\* Dept. of English/ College of Arts/ University of Mosul.

\*\* Dept. of English/ College of Education/ University of Mosul.

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example, was preoccupied in form with fixing prosody; one verse line has two hemistiches which do not have to rhyme with each other, and each second verse line presents a complete idea that is usually independent from the rest or the image or even ideas in other verses of the poet. Historically, different English romantic poems have been frequently translated in the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. They were issued on famous Arabic magazines including “**Apollo**” magazine, which motivated some Arabic poets to deal with in new mood and technique.<sup>(1)</sup>

Previously, attempts to relatively develop the subjects of writing poetry have well been experienced by some Arab poets like Al –Baroodi or Khalil Matran who gave certain significant touches to meaning. However, two groups (schools) are critically classified during that period before translating some of these romantic poetry into Arabic:

The first holds the name of Al-Diwan (الديوان) which is represented by two main Egyptian poets: Abdul Rahman Shukri and Abdel Qadir Al-Mazini (1886-1958). The second is called Apollo- (ابولو) which is well- represented by its editor Ahmad Zeki Abu Shadi and the other Egyptian poet Ali Mahmood Taha (Almuhadis).

The first group has generally stressed the role of imagination and emotion, but they could not abandon the traditional Arabic verse rhyme. They see in Shelley's poetic images very impressive world of beauty as well as pleasure and also find “the happiest moments of the best minds” in his writings.<sup>(2)</sup> Thus, they no longer express their direct ideas or seek for impossible imagination which most of Arab poets

usually like, as Safa Khulusi, the Iraqi scholar sees. Anyhow, let us read this example by Shukri who reproaches the wind here:

كما يروع زئير القاتل الضاري	ياريح أي زئير فيك يفرعني
فهل بليت بفقد الصحب والجار	ياريح أي أنين جن سامعه

The second group, according to Al-Aqqad; the Egyptian thinker, imitates highly the concept of English poetry in form and meaning, particularly in dealing with the world of birds such as nightingales, skylarks...etc. in which Keats and Wordsworth were interested. The best representatives of this group are Abu Shadi, Al-Shabi and Al-Tijani who were rather considered the revolutionists compared with the English poets Shelley (1792-18 22), Byron (1788-1824) and Keats (1795-1821).<sup>(3)</sup>

In connection with the above mentioned groups, another generation of Arab poets start to interact later on with the modern form of writing poetry. This group appears nearly in the mid-twentieth century by two main Iraqi poets Badr Shakir Al-Sayab and Nazik Al-Malaeka who write their poems in a revolutionized way and express strikingly their sense of isolation and futility. Let us read these innovative lines of Al-Sayab who feels of departure from his poem "Rain Hymn":

أصبح بالخليج يا خليج  
يا واهب المحار واللؤلؤة والندى  
فيرجع الصدى  
كأنه النشيج  
يا واهب المحار والردى ص 420

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In this example, the poet exemplifies a new form of writing verse which seems to be gaining ground in Arabic literature. Al-Sayab here discards the classical rules in favor of blank verse. This means that the single repeated rhyme is discarded in favor of many rhymes or even unrhymed verse.<sup>(4)</sup> In this realm, one basic question can be raised here: why Arab poets could not respond quickly to romanticism which started in the beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Moreover, some Arab critics go farther like Dr. Khulusi who declares that Arabic poetry has not even been involved in romantic poetry or in any of its categories.<sup>(5)</sup> This may simply belong to the long rich experience of Arabic poetry and to the absence of any European translation that can break the standard rhymed couplet form in it. In other words, the link between the contemporary and the pre-Islamic poetry (Jahili) remains active and interchangeable. But the Arab poets find, later on, in Apollo's translated poems that have an impressive impact on their visions of writing. Yet, they could hardly abandon the classic verse line.

On the contrary, the English poets hail significantly such new contribution of romantic examples that they soon start to look profoundly for their own moods in writing poetry. Indeed, the practical patterns of the translated poems formed real motive for various Arab poets who get to experience and resemble them as we are going to illustrate.

To begin with, the process of influence, the Arab poets adopt remarkably such new romantic movement that will affect their poetry. But they have to take into consideration some of its basic features: The Arab poets see first in the

poetry of *dreams* a new world, and thus the dream- poem begins to exemplify patterns of that mysterious and transforming power of dreams. In Keat's poem "Ode to a Nightingale", a notable question is well revealed: which is real, the actual world of time and place, or the ideal world of imagination?<sup>(6)</sup> The romantics find much in common between the dream world and the world of imagination. In 'Kubla Khan', the best example of dream-poem, Coleridge tackles warmly this world:

In Xanadu did Kubla Khan  
A stately pleasure- dome decree:  
Where Alph, the sacred river, ran  
Through caverns measureless to man  
(Down to a Sunless Sea. p.71)

In this concern, the Iraqi scholar, Dr. S. Khulusi, raises his critical view that most of the Arab poets write about dreams without asking questions or rationalizing them as the English romantic poets do. This perhaps supports the idea how various Arab poets could not, to a certain extent, accept the whole romantic movement which may belong either to their customs or to the absence of the whole romantic discourse.<sup>(7)</sup> The poets were deeply concerned with the world of imagination and passion. Abdul Rahman Shukri, one of the earliest poets, admits in his book **Acts of My Experience** that he is indebted to Shelley after reading nearly all his works; "The Cenci", "Alastor" and "Epipsychidion" etc.<sup>(8)</sup>

In his critical essay "A Defense of Poetry", Shelley says that "the great instrument of morals is the imagination".<sup>(9)</sup> Similarly, the Arab poets find a visionary state to activate

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imagination in order to experience its power. They look to *imagination* as the only way which leads to love, justice and freedom. In this atmosphere the Arab romantic poet finds his world of pleasure:<sup>(10)</sup>

الحس مجلية الكآبة والأسى      قم نطلق من عالم الإحساس  
لأرى السعادة لا وجود لعرشها      إلا بأجنحة من الوسواس

The natural world is the third element which gives the Arab poets a source of joy through seeing, hearing and feeling. There is a reaching towards the ideal world in their poems: Are not the mountains:

Waves and skies, apart  
Of me and of my soul, as I of them  
(ChildHarold S Pilgrimage)

Whereas Abdul Rahman Shukri writes:

ألا ياطائر الفردوس      إن الشعر وجدان

Analogously the Arab poets share the romantic poets the same look to nature when they try, like them, to externalize their emotions through natural correspondences: the mountains, the seas and the birds:

إني امرؤ لاشيء يطرب روحه      ويهزها كالزهر والإحان  
أصغي إلى النسيمات تروي للربي      ما قالت الأشجار للغدران

Here the close relationship between the internal mind and the external world is clearly detected, for the natural world and the mind affect each other. Now through translation, the Arab poets succeed undoubtedly in adopting this concept. We can

say, though this literary movement may not represent socially a complete revolution in the Arab world it is, to a certain extent, a source of tension and change. The Arab poet now is never to be a skilful craftsman. He is, according to Shelley, a magician or nearly a prophet. In the same mood, Abu Shadi celebrates the gifts of the English poet W. Shakespeare:<sup>(11)</sup>

فأنت النبي وما الأنبياء      بإحسانهم غير نفح يضوع

Whereas Ali M. Taha says:

هبط الليل كالشعاع السني      بعصا ساحر وقلب نبي  
حينما شارفت به أفق الأرض      وزها الكون بالوليد الصبي

In the same atmosphere, we can remember the following verse lines said by Mukhallad Al Mawsli who praises the famous Abbasid poet Abu Tammam:<sup>(12)</sup>

يا نبي الله في الشعر      ويا عيسى بن مريم  
أنت من اشعر خلق      الله ما لم تتكلم

**Such elegant images as:** نبي الله في الشعر و عصا ساحر، قلب نبي، الوليد الصبي are based in form on religion in describing the poet, or at least on understanding tradition because a poet is romantically a man inspired by God.<sup>(13)</sup>

In reviewing some Egyptian poets, many of them are considered the best representatives of those who read Shelley's poems deeply and experienced various parts of his poetry. They are Abdel Qadir Al Mazini, Abul Rahman Shukri, and Ali M. Taha.

P. B. Shelley (1792-1882) is the most English romantic poet whose poems were early translated into Arabic. He

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admires Rousseau who was for him a visionary and moralist poet and thinker, and he is even compared to Jesus Christ. The images he employs in his poems are substantial; things, winds, dead leaves, sounds, colors, waters. He also refuses to accept life as it is lived.

Primarily, one question which can be raised here is: why do some poets and translators choose Shelley's poems in particular? The answer perhaps lies in showing that Arabic poetry, like the English, is rather sympathetic and is concerned with abstractions and impressions. Various Islamic names and other oriental terms are included in his poems such as prophet, Mohammad, Christ, or countries as Egypt and Ethiopia, or rivers like the Nile. But his book "**The Revolt of Islam**" is certainly exciting with its content about Othman, the Muslim Caliph.<sup>(14)</sup>

Beside the eternal Nile  
The Pyramids have risen  
Nile shall pursue his change less away  
(Mab Queen p.12)

The second remarkable poet is A. Z. Abu Shadi's early translation of "Ode to the Skylark" in (1910) or "Ode to the West Wind" by A. Shukri which both influenced him in their romantic atmosphere. No doubt, Bulgreve's poetical book "The Golden Treasury" records a considerable role in the cultural movement at that time, and captured deeply the attention of both poets and readers. In this concern, the poetical contribution of the later Arab romantic poets especially the emigrant (Gibran, Abu Madi and Nuaema) were

artistically recognized in their patterns. Others allied themselves with the social and political issues as Abu Al Qasim Al Shabi, the Tunisian poet whose well-known creativity illuminates the scene of Arabic poetry.

ورق نشيد الحياة المقدس      في هيكل حالم من سحر  
وأعلن في الكون أنّ الطموح      ح لهيب الحياة وروح الظفر

We can now illustrate certain examples of such impact on both poets, Al-Mazini, and Ali Mahmood Taha, the famous Egyptian poets.

### ***Ibrahim A. Al-Mazini:***

Ibrahim A. Al-Mazini is an outstanding poet, a translator and a novelist. He edified generations of both readers and writers alike. Together with his literary friends, Taha Hussein and Al-Aqqad, begin their bright efforts in flourishing the modern literary movement.

The reader to most of Al-Mazini's poems detect first that many of his titles are rather influenced by the English romantic poet, Shelley. Al-Mazini as well as the poet Taha reconciled with the spirit of imagination and passion.

Let us review some important romantic titles in English poetry as: "Ode to the West Wind", "Adonais" and "To a Skylark" by Shelley. "Ode to a Nightingale", and "To Autumn" by Keats, "The Ancient Mariner" and "Kubla Khan" by Coleridge, besides the early poem by T. Gray "An Elegy" written in "A country Churchyard". In a parallel aspect, we find how various Arab poets who are obviously inspired by such romantic titles particularly Al-Mazini whose titles are, to

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a great extent, similar to the preceded ones as we see: (Wind and Poetry – (الرياح والشعر) و (The Magical Mariner- الملاح المسحور) (The Dream of the Dead- احلام الموتى) and (Melodies of the Sea's Daughters - الحان بنات البحر). In examining both types, one can immediately feel that Arabic poetry start to hold actual discontent with the traditional ones.<sup>(15)</sup>

Another close aspect of similarity deals with his poetic diction. For example, certain romantic words and items are overwhelmed in his lines: “spirit, dream, impulse, tear, death, night, forget,” can easily be identified in Al-Mazini's poetry. Such close affinity may progressively appear when some of his terms are resounded in the following example though with little artificiality. Shelley says: It breathes mute music on thy sleep: “Its odor calms thy brain”.

Whereas Al-Mazini writes:

فأغان خرساء ترصف في الأسد      ماع منشور مفرحات الأماني  
ونسيم لنا يهب على النفس      س بعرف الريحان والأقحوان

Consider here the clear accordance in mood and construction.

Indeed, Al-Mazini's ideas and images are undoubtedly well modified to suit the sense of Arabic poetry. The following example shows how Al-Mazini's lines echo some of Shelley's ideas and his elegant images particularly in lamenting their friends. For example, in his poem “Adonis”, Shelley celebrates the death of his friend, the poet Keats:<sup>(16)</sup>

He lives, he awakes, its death is dead, not he  
Mourn not for Adonis. Though young Dawn  
(L. 361)

In similar expression, Al-Mazini also laments a lover poet:

وما مات إلا الموت يا فجر فاتلق      وحول سناء ذلك المثاليا

Shelley states again:

peace, peace, he is not dead, he doth not sleep  
He hath awakened from the dream of life

In a direct analogy Al-Mazini restates

وما غاله موت ولا هاضه كرى      ولكن غدا من حلم ذا العيش راضيا  
لقد كان في روض الجمال خميلة      سقتها دموع الحب لا الطل ساقيا

No doubt, this close relationship between both poets reveals the deep impact on Al-Mazini since he has a perfect command of English language that enabled him to study various romantic masterpieces.

Moreover, the story of Shelley's poem "The Magnetic Lady in her Patient" shows how the lady invokes the lover to sleep so as to forget his pain. In a similar modified manner, Al-Mazini portrays his poem "رقية الحسنة" which is evidently influenced by it when the lady encourages similarly the lover to sleep and forget his pain too: <sup>(17)</sup>

نم هنيئا في ظلي الفينان      وانس برح الهموم والأشجان  
وانس ما كان من زفير على الهجر      ودمع يجري بغير عنان  
هذه راحتى على وجهك الغض      وروحي وريفة الأفتان

In addition, the Egyptian writer Gehan Safwat shows more of Shelley's typical effect on his poetry. For example, in his poem "Philosophy of love" he says: <sup>(18)</sup>

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The fountains mingle with the river  
And the rivers with the oceans  
The winds of heaven mix forever with  
Sweet emotion.  
Nothing in the world is single

.....

Why not I with thine?  
(philosophy of Love)

Notice the direct impact on these following lines which reaffirm the recurrent similarity between the two patterns:

ومسقط الظل على الزهر	يا مجرى النهر هلى البحر
ة عند التياح الارض للقطر	وجامعا بين الثرى والحياء
والاغصن الميس للطيير	وواهب الموجة صدر اختها

Briefly, nature in both types of poetry is highly exalted in a sort of mystical scene; the mountains reach the sky, the waves kiss each other and the sun embraces earth. <sup>(19)</sup>

***Ali Mahmood Taha:***

Another major poet whose poems are deeply involved in romantic experience is Ali M. Taha (Al-Muhandis) (1902-1949). This distinguished poet was fond of Arabic literature. He was brought up in a well educated family. Being involved in romantic atmosphere, he tries to express the beauty of nature and translate some of Shelley's poems such as: "Ode to the West Wind" and "To a Skylark" which gave much to other poets in terms of the relation between nature and life. "Spirits

and Ghosts” and “Flowers and Wine” represent some of his significant poetic works.<sup>(20)</sup>

Ali M. Taha traces basically Shelley’s concept of nature, his definition of poetry, his use of mythology or in dealing with some of his subjects such as: dream, love, solitude and death. It is known that in his critical views, Shelley considers the poet nearly a prophet, whereas Ali M. Taha sees him analogously a magician especially when we read this pictorial image in his poem “The Hesitant Mariner”:

في تجاليد هيكل بشري	لمحة من أشعة الروح حلت
بعصا ساحر وقلب نبي	هبط الأرض كالشعاع السني

In dealing with nature, Taha treats it in the same way Shelley thinks of, but in a modified form. Indeed, both poets express highly their own feelings of happiness and hesitation through words such as: rocks, seas, and birds”. For example, Taha portrays some symbols in rhythmical images to express that deep tension of man’s situation on earth. He follows the same manner of using words such as “wind” or “sea” in what Wordsworth calls a “meditative-descriptive style”.<sup>(21)</sup> He includes metaphorically various terms related to the word “sea” in well romantic expressions such as:

ألقاك في بحر من الرعب-هيمنان بين شواطئ الأبد-تهفو على الأمواج صورته

Now in his poem “Alastor”, Shelley describes the cruelty of death, whereas Taha tries to show us his faithful response in one of his poems called: “A poet’s grave” - “قبر شاعر”:

وجاورته نخلة باسقة تجثم في الوادي الى جنبه  
تنن فيها النسمة الخافضة كأنما تخفق عن قلبه

Moreover, Ali Taha celebrates the death of his friend, the poet Ahmad Shawqi, and in the same lamenting mood Shelley acts towards his friend Keats in his poem "Adonis": For example, Shelley's "He lives, he awakes, Its Death is dead, not he" -resounds in Taha's:

أيها الشاعر الكئيب مضى الليل وما زلت غارقا في شجونك  
مسلماً رأسك الحزين إلى الفكر وللشهد ذابلات جفونك ص 372

No one can neglect Shelley's poems that are mostly full of a number of values like justice, tolerance and freedom. They are rather treated in Platonic sense and this influential aspect can be immensely detected in Ali Taha's writing through the idea of "spirit in body". This makes him analyze the conflict between good and evil as it is shown in one of his antithetic verse lines:<sup>(22)</sup>

الخير والشر توأمان  
والحب والشهوة في طبعها  
حواء والشيطان لا يبرحان  
يساقطان السحر في سمعها

One more important aspect of similarity between them appears in dealing with mythology. Shelley enriches his poems with some Greek gods such as: "Prometheus, Zeus and Jupiter", and in a parallel way Taha includes certain modern or

historical names in some of his poems which are really familiar to Arab readers: “Cleopatra, Al-Karnak”... etc. He sometimes describes gods in a modified way to accord with our tradition; (عروس البحر - nymph), (أرواح - spirits) in order to express what man feels or to reflect a sort of conflict in his poetry.<sup>(23)</sup>

Generally speaking, some basic subjects have undoubtedly fascinated the Arab romantic poets who get to deal with dreams, love and nature poetry in a different respect from logic or nature of things. It is “the creation of action”. If the ‘ilihaJ’ poet pleads the night to disappear because of his inner pain and sleeplessness as: Imru aln

ألا أيها الليل الطويل ألا انجل      بصبح وما الإصباح منك بأمثل

The romantic poet Eliya Abu –Madi celebrates أنت أيها الليل too much the night:

أيها الليل أنت أبهى من الفجر      وإن كنت اسود الطيلسان

Indeed, the two verse lines do not actually reveal a slight difference in image as much as a change in view of the developed new life.

Out of this interaction between the two romantic movements, we conclude that much has been given to Arabic poetry and art. In their early attempts of translating Shelley’s poems, A. Shukri, Al-Mazini and Ali M. Taha succeed in their experimentation in spite of the clear-cut echoes here and there. One more important fruit is the progressive step before the birth of the blank verse later on, besides the modern poetical discourse especially in writing non- instructive poetry.<sup>(24)</sup>

Notes

1. جيهان صفوت: شيلي في الأدب العربي في مصر: مصر، دار المعارف، مكتبة الدراسات الأدبية، 1987، ص 45.
2. د. صفاء خلوصي: دراسات في الأدب المقارن والمذاهب الأدبية (بغداد، مطبعة الرابطة، 1958) ص. 27.
3. خلوصي، ص 127.
4. "T. S. Eliot's Influence on Arabic Poetry and Theater in," Comparative Literature Studies, Vol.v, No.1 (Univ. of Illinois, 1969) p.422.
5. خلوصي، 193.
6. J. R. WATSON, **English Poetry of the Romantic Period 1789-1830** (London: Longman Group Limited, 1985), p.52.
7. T. S. Eliot, 478.
8. خلوصي، ص 63.
9. صفوت، ص 67.
10. Percy Bysshe-Shelley, "**Defense of Poetry**" ed. by Enright and E. de Chickera (London: Oxford Univ. Press, 1962) p.225.
11. Shelley, p.223.
12. خلف رشيد نعمان، شرح الصولي لديوان الأمدي (العراق، وزارة الثقافة والإعلام، سلسلة التراث (55) 1997، 212.
13. Ifor Evans, **A Short History of English Literature**, (England: Penguin Books Ltd, Harmondsworth Middlesex, 1976), p.88.

14. صفوت، ص36.
15. صفوت، ص65.
16. صفوت، ص 86.
17. صفوت، ص 45.
18. صفوت، ص 18.
19. صفوت، ص 87.
20. Watson, p.143.
21. Enright and De Chickera, **W. Wordsworth, "Preface to Lyrical Ballads"**, p.244.
22. Watson, p.244.
23. أنور المعداوي، **علي محمود طه..الشاعر والإنسان** (وزارة الثقافة والإعلام، دار الشؤون الثقافية العراقية، 1986، ص 91).

## تأثير شعر شيلي على الشعراء المازني وطه

أ.م. عبدالجبار جاسم محمد\* و السيد ميسر قاسم ذنون\*\*

### المستخلص

يهدف هذا البحث إلى دراسة الحركة الرومانتيكية وخصائصها مركزاً على تأثيرها على الأدب العربي وخاصة تأثير الشاعر الرومانتيكي شيلي 1792-1822 على اثنين من الشعراء العرب: عبد القادر المازني (1890-1949) وعلي محمود طه (1902-1949). كما يهدف البحث أيضاً إلى بيان أوجه الشبه والاختلاف بين المازني وطه من جهة وشيلي من جهة أخرى.

في القرن العشرين تجاوب العديد من الشعراء العرب بصورة ايجابية مع الحركة الرومانتيكية الانكليزية وتأثروا بالعديد من شعرائها من خلال التراجم الشعرية التي وقعت بين أيديهم.

تأثر المازني تأثراً كبيراً بالشاعر شيلي ويتضح هذا التأثير بصورة جلية من خلال عناوين القصائد التي اختارها الشاعر لقصائده وهي مشابهة لقصائد شيلي. كما أن التشابه واضح من خلال استخدام المفردات والأفكار المتشابهة. مثل موضوع الطبيعة والحب... أما طه فقد تأثر هو الآخر بشيلي من خلال ترجمته للعديد من قصائد هذا الشاعر الرومانتيكي المبدع. ويتضح أيضاً من خلال التشابه في الأفكار التي تناولها الشاعران.

\* قسم اللغة الإنكليزية/ كلية الآداب/ جامعة الموصل.

\*\* قسم اللغة الإنكليزية/ كلية التربية/ جامعة الموصل.