

Inspiration Versus Craftsmanship A Contrastive Study

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One of the perspectives that has a close relationship with the conception of literature is inspiration. The focus of this study is to investigate the concept of inspiration in both the Greek and Arabic cultures. Craftsmanship in tradition, which stands opposite to inspiration, is also ruminated. Since inspiration runs under psychology and the beginning of the writings of psycho-analysis, so the study will investigate this concept as well. Both criticisms-Greek and Arabic-express a profound interest in this phenomenon. The Greeks expressed their interest through their belief in the Muses and Oracles whereas the Arabs thought of inspiration in terms of the poets' demons and Wadi Abqir.

Since the dawn of history, the concept of inspiration has been one major concern of literary criticism. Philosophers and scholars are involved in giving an interpretation that would undergo a significant understanding in the Greek and Arabic cultures.

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Differences and similarities are expressed. These not only expand the concept by giving a psychoanalytic frame of reference, but they colour the concept almost exclusively with many connotations.

Inspiration, a concept used in literary criticism, is the poet's extraordinary ability with words by referring it to external forces. This notion is found in the Greek and Arabic mythology. This basic meaning survives to the modern era. For the Greeks, inspiration has something to deal with the idea of the daughters of Zeus, the god of poetry. For them the poet is inspired by one of the Muses or Oracles. Socrates in Plato's Dialogues has mentioned the real sources of poetry by referring to inspiration by affirming the idea that poets do not necessarily know the meanings of what they say⁽¹⁾ the reference to the external forces-these muses are the nine daughters of Zeus. The poet has just become the mouthpiece of that muse. So his ability with words comes from the Muse⁽²⁾. The poet is able to say something ordinary people cannot say. He is governed by external power when he says poetry otherwise he is not able to say something astonishing. Horace affirms the idea of the Muse in his The Art of Poetry by saying "To the Greeks who coveted nothing but glory, the Muse gave genius and the power of eloquence⁽³⁾.

When somebody tries to see the meaning of inspiration in Arabic culture, he finds almost something similar to the Greek one.

The Muse in the Greek is similar to the demon in the Arabic. The Arabs have got two distinguished notions about inspiration. First, the poet is inspired and instructed by a demon. This provides the poet with what he says. It means he becomes the spokesman of the Demon. The poets themselves sometimes propagated the idea of being possessed by demons. These demons are called the “Poets’ Demon”. If a poet is not inspired by them he would not be able to say good poetry. Only the demons have the ability to make the poet say poetry. The second notion the Arabs believe in is that if a poet wants to be a good poet, he must go to a valley called “Wadi Abqir”. There he would spend some days then he would become a good poet. The word “Abqiri” means “genius” in Arabic comes from the name of this valley. Both notions in the Arabic culture refer to the ability of the poet with words from external power.

We have dealt so far with the basic interpretations of inspiration in both the Greek and Arabic cultures. Since inspiration refers to the poet’s ability with words, then imagination is also to be considered because it refers to something similar to the conception of inspiration. Imagination is the source of inspiration for it makes the poet compose poetry. Imagination according to Coleridge, who was developed an elaborate theory of the concept of imagination, is of two kinds: Primary and Secondary ones. People all share the primary one whereas the secondary is only found in poets, artists

and literary men⁽⁴⁾. Imagination for the Romantics has close relation with creativity. It is for them the soul of the poet's ability with words. Only poets are able to cultivate their choice of words in an artistic way that other people cannot do.

In the middle of the nineteenth century with the coming of Freud and his followers, the reference to the ability of the poet with words has taken other different situation. They refer to the ability of the poet with words to an internal side. They say that there are certain bents in the mind of poet which are responsible for the poet's excellence in poetry. There is no place for the external power that inspires or instructs him. The ancient Greek and Arabic notions have nothing to do with the ideas of Freud and his followers. These bents in the minds of the poets enable them to say poetry. They refer to the creating or the creative process, instead of inspiration, that would enable poets of poetry. To Freud, a clear reference is fully expressed showing the ability of the mind in making poetry, because, "the mind is a poetry making organ"⁽⁵⁾. When psychology refers to the ability of the poet with words by referring to certain traits or characteristics that appear in his work, the text becomes the mirror in which one could find enough information or data to explain the life of the poet. The inference from the psychological interpretation of the idea of inspiration is to uncover more understandings of the concept and to illustrate the different aspects

related to it. Although it does not cover fully the meaning of craftsmanship, yet it opens the door to enrich the study of craftsmanship that stands in sharp contrast with the concept of Inspiration.

It is a craftsmanship which is to be considered that stands in sharp contrast with the conception of inspiration in terms of external power that enables the poet to compose poetry. Craftsmanship is the ability of accomplishing a field of art using training of skillful hands and minds. It is a cunning ability of somebody who practises a craft. When a craftsmanship is concerned with poetry, it gives the meaning of a poet who tries and attempts writing poetry through using his mind by adding and changing words, whenever he wants to make his poem better. Writing poetry in terms of craftsmanship comes best through practice and change. The craftsman's experience helps to make the craft better. The more you practise poetry, the better you become. The poet is made not born. It does not follow what the Greeks and the Arabs have of the external ability in writing poetry. Craftsmanship does not believe in Muses or Demons.

Instead of the concept of creativity of psychology and the special bents a person has, craftsmanship comes and grows through practice and training. It approves of having certain rules and principles to be imitated. If a poet writes a poem, he must write

according to the rules of good poetry. If he is able enough to use or follow the principles then his poetry comes good. As if there were certain formula to be followed when a poet trying poetry. This formula presents “pleasure and exuberance”⁽⁶⁾. The feeling of pleasure is associated with the arts when it is concerned with craftsmanship. Such an association provides a fruitful way of linking emotions with the experience the poet has. The association of emotions with the experience which follow rules and principles allows Frye to assert that exuberance is, of course, as much with the mind as it with emotions⁽⁷⁾.

Horace’s ideas and concerns are taken into consideration about his beliefs in the ancient tradition of craftsmanship. Although he was a Roman, yet he considered the Greek tradition the best to be followed. Every one must thumb the Greek masterpieces of Aristotle and Plato⁽⁸⁾. If a poet does not follow the rules and the masterpieces, he will be mediocre and unimportant one. Horace is interested in giving rules and asking poets to conform to standards, as he said “I should advise the skilled imitator to observe actual life and manners and to draw from them a language true to life”⁽⁹⁾. When a poet follows the standards and manners it means he is a benefactor of society i.e. he is both religious and moral. Decorum of Horace has a relationship with craftsmanship because it means the rightness of each part to the whole. The writing should be

appropriate to the subject matter. Poetry is a purely practice treatise and how a poet should avoid certain pitfalls. Horace's claim of following the Greeks is that the poet is sane and poetry is a sane art too. He believes that his purpose is to show the people the real assessment of literature and not to let the poet be taken in by the hidden spirit of the fox ⁽¹⁰⁾.

The product of art, according to the recent interpretation, is a product of mind. It means internal product. If somebody does not have a real experience or suffering then his inspiration would not be ample to form images or pictures that arouse great literature. So craftsmanship in the sense of experience or suffering helps poets to form better images and to compose beautiful pictures and subjects.

To show the clear cut between inspiration and craftsmanship expresses one side of the discussion. The similarities and interrelations which show a subtle thread between the two concepts is also illustrated.

Literature functions as the art of composition, imagery and communication. When somebody speaks about the aesthetic part of an art, it means he talks about the tool used to form that literature. Literary composition means a product of an experience or a suffering happened to the author. It might be a real one or a story he heard or a fancy or an illusion coming to his mind. Some strange

thing must be included in that experience that would move the writer to compose and communicate to others. This experience which controls the artist is called inspiration. It has the power to form an art. Whenever the experience is grandeur, inspiration would be great. Ad Longinus mentioned in his On the Sublime, the grandeur experience forms a great thought⁽¹¹⁾. Aristotle in his Poetics refers to the imaginative incentive which is very important in poetry. It is possible to imagine life as it is, but our feelings and emotions move heavily our imagination. It is the power to inspire poetry. The imaginative power which is associated with experience presents exuberance and Frye asserts. "The work of imagination presents as with a vision, not of personal greatness of the poet, but of something impersonal and far greater... the vision of the recreation of man⁽¹²⁾. This great vision is presented even when poetry forms realistic life. This idea opposes Plato's idea of poetry, which says poetry is an imitation of imitation. For Aristotle, imitation is similar to a craft or a technique. The poet, thorough the technique reaches at the end to the aim of inspiration. The language used expresses inspiration. Some people believe that writing poetry is a natural and spontaneous inspiration. It is so natural yet this inspiration should be trained. This training proves that craftsmanship helps people how to use this inspiration. Ben Jonson affirms the idea of craftsmanship rather than inspiration because

inspiration is chaotic. It should be restrained in order to be more effective. Jonson in his claim to follow the ideals means the creative process must be under the control of craftsmanship. This realization makes the interrelation between inspiration and craftsmanship. Thus we actually feel a need to transform “raw fantasy into a total experience of aesthetic, moral, intellectual or social coherence and significance⁽¹³⁾”. To transform this experience to others means a person must use a tool of communication. This tool uses words and diction. So the first step to communicate it to others is to divide its unity into smaller parts. The author must be aware of forming these parts to make one united idea. This unity forms an elaborate image.

Dante, Shakespeare and Milton would not be able to express or illustrate great ideas unless they have got great ability of inspiration. Their control of the language and their great ability of inspiration give them a great sensitive feeling. The great feelings and the suffering form the experience in the poet. This experience is not so simple, but it is complicated because it involves two thoughts: the source of the idea and what the idea gives to others. In poetry, finally, we find an event which starts and ends clearly. Its parts are united. The person in this event lives in a world he likes. Our sensations in the events or experience we live make us live in a world whose parts are all united.

Inspiration is as important and relevant to modern criticism as it has always been. Its meaning has been tackled throughout the history of literary criticism. I have pointed out the major reorientation in its interpretations in both the Greek and Arabic cultures. To some extent both cultures share similar notions concerning the concept of inspiration, in terms of composing poetry and how to compose it. The ancient ideas concentrate on the external power when referring to the ability with words or composition. This is by no means alone expressed, the opposite concept in tradition, craftsmanship is also declared. Through the historical survey, it is explained with reference to the ideas of different distinguished critics like Plato, Aristotle, Horace, Longinus, Ben Jonson and others. Finally the analytical recent understanding of inspiration and craftsmanship is also taken into consideration and how it shows that there is a subtle thread of difference between the two concepts. Modern and psychological analysis of inspiration and craftsmanship is not forgotten.

Notes

1. Lionel Trilling ed, *Literary Criticism: An Introductory Reader* (N.Y: Holt, Prinehart, Winston, 1970), pp. 29-37.
2. W.J. Bate, *Criticism: The Major Texts* (N.Y: Harcourt, Brace, Jovanvich, 1970), p. 39.
3. Horace, *The Art of Poetry*. Quoted from Adanan K. Abdullah, *History of Literary Criticism: An Introductory Reader* (Mosul: Mosul Univ. Press 1989), p. 92.
4. Coleridge's *Biographia literaria*. Quoted from W. J. Bate. *Criticism: The Major Texts*, p. 387.
5. Adnan K. Abdullah *Catharsis in literature* (Bloomington: Indiana Univ. Press, 1985) , p. 48.
6. Notthrop Frye, *Anatomy of Criticism: Four Essays* (Princeton, N. J.: Princeton Univ. Press, 1957), p. 94.
7. Ibid., p. 94.
8. Horace's *The Art of Poetry. From Abdullah's History of Literary Criticism*, p. 83.
9. Ibid., p. 93.
10. Ibid., p. 95.
11. Longinus, On the Sublime. From Adnan K. Abdulla's History of Literary Criticism, p. 100.
12. Frye, *Anatomy of Criticism*, p. 94.

13. Norman Holland, "Criticism as Transaction" in *What is Criticism?* ed. by Paul Hernadi (Bloomington: Indiana Univ. Press, 1981), p. 125.

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ملخص

الإلهام ضد الصنعة: دراسة مقارنة

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يعتبر الإلهام مفهوماً مهماً في الحضارتين الإغريقية والعربية ويشارك هذه الأهمية أيضاً مفهوم الصنعة. فالدراسة والبحث لهذين المفهومين جدرة بالذکر لما لهما ذکر وباع في الدراسات النفسية وعلم النفس والتحليل النفسي. فمن هذا المنطلق يبدي الإغريقي والعرب ولعاً شديداً بدراستهما إذ يعبر الإغريق عن مفهوم الإلهام بعلاقته واعتقادهم بالإله كما يبدي العرب فكره مشابه لذلك بعلاقة الإلهام بشياطين الشعراء ووادي عبقر.

فان الباحثين والمهتمين بمفهوم الإلهام ابدوا اهتماماً منذ القدم به كما كان للصنعة نفس الاهتمام من قبل النقاد والمهتمين بالأدب. وعلى مدى قرون عديدة فان سقراط في محاورات أفلاطون يعتبر مصدر الشعر هو الإلهام وان هذا الإلهام يأتي من الإله كما للعرب مفهوم مشابه لذلك حيث يعتبرون مصدر الشعر شياطين الشعراء وكما جاء على لسان الشعراء بأنهم أحياناً لا يستطيعوا كتابة الشعر ما لم يأتيهم شيطانهم.

(*) قسم اللغة الإنكليزية _ كلية الآداب / جامعة الموصل.

أما الصنعة فهي تقف ضد وعكس مفهوم الإلهام بحيث ان مفهوم الشعر هو عبارة عن تمرين وممارسة كما هو التدريب على عمل شيء باستخدام فكره ويديه: فالشاعر يحاول كتابة الشعر باستخدام قدراته العقلية فنراه يبذل ويغير الكلمات والجمل والصور لكي يصنع قصيدة اجمل كما يعتقد فالخلق والإبداع يأتي بالتغيير والتبديل والمحاولات ليس كقوالب جاهزة لا يمكن تغييرها. غير اننا لا ننسى بان للشاعر يجب ان تكون لديه قدرات عقلية فعالة وعالية وأحاسيس جميلة لكي يصنع قصيدة وان هذا يجعل من الفرق قليلا بين هذين المفهومين (الإلهام والصنعة).