رمزية الماء في شعر تي اس اليوت ومظفر النواب

Water Symbolism in T. S. Eliot's and Mudhaffar al-Nawwab's Poetry

م.م. زينب ليث عبد الجبار
Asst.lect. Zaynab Layth Abdul Jabbar
وزارة التعليم العالي والبحث العلمي/ دائرة الدراسات والتخطيط والمتابعة
Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research\ Studies, planning and Follow-up Directorate
E-mail: alna2sir@gmail.com

الكلمات المفتاحية: الشـــعر الحديث، الادب المقارن، الرمزية، تي اس اليوت، الارض اليباب، مظفر النواب، الشعر العربي الحديث.

Keywords: Modern Poetry, Comparative literature, Symbolism, T. S. Eliot, The Waste Land, Mudaffar al-Nawwab, Modern Arabic Poetry.

الملخص

يجمع هذا البحث بين شـــاعرين معروفين من الغرب والشـــرق وهما تي اس اليوت ومظفر النواب. وبالرغم من أنهما لا يعتبران من شعراء الرمزية إلا أنهما استخدما العديد من الرموز، كل وفق ســياقه وبما يخدم غاياته. فكلاهما مهتم بقضــايا عصــره وكلاهما وجد في رمزية الماء طريقة مثلى للتعبير عن محن العصـــر والامة. ولهذا الغرض يتناول البحث رمزية الماء في قصـيدة اليوت "الارض اليباب" وإحدى قصـائد النواب الطويلة وهي "قراءات في دفتر المطر" لبيان توظيف النواب لهذه الرمزية.

Abstract

This paper brings together two well-known poets from the Western and the Eastern worlds, T. S. Eliot and Mudhaffar al-Nawwab. Although they are not considered symbolist, they have used many symbols, each in his own context to serve their aims. Both are concerned with the issues of their age and have found water symbolism an exemplary way to convey their mode of commentary on the distress of their age and nations. For this purpose Eliot's "The Waste Land" discussed with special focus on the employment of water symbols, while "A Reading of the Notebook of Rain" is chosen from one of al-Nawwab's long poems to elucidate the use of such symbols.

1-Introduction

Many issues bring these two giant poets together in a research, but perhaps the most important mutual element is their concerns for their age. This concern, in both poets transcends their national borders; for Eliot, it goes for the whole European (Western) nations; and, for al-Nawwab, it goes for the Arab nations. Both are not considered symbolist poets, but they have used symbols here and there as to serve their aims. A central symbol in the poetry of both of these poets is the water symbol, be it in the form of rain, river, sea, or even tears. To hold such a comparison, one poem is chosen for each: Eliot's "The Waste Land", and al-Nawab's "Quira'at un fi Daftar al-Matar" [A Reading in the Notebook of Rain].

2- Eliot's Water Symbolism

"The Waste Land" (1922) appeared in its due time. "For a man like Eliot, imbued with the idea of the contract of eternal society, the prospect of Europe in the autumn of 1921 was dismal enough" (Kirk 61). Almost each and every European country was afflicted in one way or another by the Great War. The decay dominated all systems without exceptions, not even the church. "Out of the War's brutality had emerged gross appetites and violent ambitions, and everywhere egoism swaggered" (Kirk 62). Although many critical voices consider this poem of Eliot as an echo of a personal troubled mind, an individual's unfulfilled hopes of love, greater many others believe that it speaks for the prevalent spiritual malaise of the twentieth century. After all, Eliot did not like personality, for two years prior to the publication of "The Waste Land", Eliot has declared, in his "Tradition and the Individual Talent" the necessity, for any artist who is to be successful, for "a continual extinction of personality" (Eliot, *SW* 29).

Much has been said about "The Waste Land" since its publication in 1922, and it still instigates criticism all over the world due to its unique characteristics. It is even considered postmodern, ahead of its time, with all its inter-textuality, heteroglossia and pastiche. Symbolism is only one aspect of the poem; "throughout its pages, "The Waste Land" plays with and, to some degree, virtually milks humankind's vastest and most common store of symbols and symbolical imagery and actions" (Murphy 444). Again, water symbolism is only one example of the many other symbols. But it is, one may dare say, an overriding symbol and central to its theme.

The milieu of "The Waste Land" is that of the bored Sibyl, as suggested by its epigraph, of those who are living death-in-life. The main concern, thus, is to make his audience curious to diagnose the problem; an attempt toward self-consciousness, regardless of suggesting any solution. ""The Waste Land" takes its readers on a hellish journey for the sake of bringing them, like Dante, to some point of positive recognition that the

hell of self can be mastered and left behind" (Murphy 441). The central symbol is the desert, lack of water, and as Craig Raine puts it, it is "a candid, recognizably familiar symbol for spiritual aridity, for failure of feeling" (83).

Much of the poem's symbolism is drawn from the Grail legend, where the impotent Fisher King rules a desert land. In spite of this dismal setting, the begins and ends with rain. The "spring rain" (*Collected Poems* 53, and henceforth all references to Eliot's poem are made) of the forth line is the workings of a cruel April. It is cruel for a dead soul who does not wish to wake up; a soul which feeds on "dull roots" (53) and feels warm, perhaps out of numbness, in "forgetful snow" (53), like the hyacinth girl, "neither living nor dead" (54), in a land where "the dead tree gives no shelter …And the dry stone no sound of water" (53). It is rain that will be longed for throughout the poem.

"The Fire Sermon" begins with an image of River Thames; the tone is elegiac lamenting the beauty and glory that is gone. River banks are usually associated with culture and civilization, the river once sung to by Spenser is compared to the same river of the twentieth century. Eliot thus describes the scene:

> The river's tent is broken: the last fingers of leaf
> Clutch and sink into the wet bank. The wind
> Crosses the brown land, unheard. The nymphs are departed.
> Sweet Thames, run softly, till I end my song.
> The river bears no empty bottles, sandwich papers,
> Silk handkerchiefs, cardboard boxes, cigarette ends
> Or other testimony of summer nights. The nymphs are departed.
> And their friends, the loitering heirs of city directors;
> Departed, have left no addresses.
> By the waters of Leman I sat down and wept . . .
> Sweet Thames, run softly till I end my song,
> Sweet Thames, run softly, for I speak not loud or long.
> But at my back in a cold blast I hear
> The rattle of the bones, and chuckle spread from ear to ear. (60)

The riverbanks which are supposed to be green, are here "brown" though "wet", and the last leaf clutches for survival, but fails and finally sinks. Riverbanks are deserted, and Spenserian song of love and fertility that Eliot affixes here is a poignant contrast between the past and present. The squalor of the river is asserted by an ironic "no", or perhaps the absence of these "empty bottles, sandwich papers,

Silk handkerchiefs, cardboard boxes, cigarette ends" is the absence of aspects of life. They are litter, but at least, they testify life and lively "summer nights". The ghostlike banks, the "cold blast", and "the rattle of

bones" are reason enough to make the speaker sit down and "weep", or perhaps "chuckle" in a gothic hysterical scene.

The river image of "The Fire Sermon", then, offers no salvation. And, neither does the sea image of the next section "Death by Water". On the contrary, it is a symbol of death rather than life. The tone is cautionary: "O you who turn the wheel and look to windward,/ Consider Phlebas, who was once handsome and tall as you." (65) To those who suffer from death-in-life, only real death can make them realize the value of life. It is a pity, the poem suggest, to waste this short life aimlessly. The sea, therefore, becomes a symbol of both death and life. Phlebas the Phoenician, can no more sense the "cry of gulls"; neither is he concerned about "profit and loss": it all ends here with death.

The last section, "What the Thunder Said" is the most important and, as Eliot once wrote "the only part that justifies the whole at all" (Quoted in Scofield 120). Scofield considers this part "a kind of crisis, and the sickness of the Waste Land is diagnosed and pronounced upon, though not finally cured" (121). The poem reaches to a sense of finality with the word "After", repeated three times successively. It brings together the past agonies, where there "is no water but only rock" of the first section. The drought and the longing for water is revisited:

If there were water
And no rock
If there were rock
And also water
And water
A spring
A pool among the rock
If there were the sound of water only
Not the cicada
And dry grass singing
But sound of water over a rock
Where the hermit-thrush sings in the pine trees
Drip drop drip drop drop drop drop
But there is no water. (66-67)

After these supplications comes the hope with "A flash of lightening, then a damp gust/Bringing rain" (68). But lightening and rain carry a message in Sanskrit to humanity: "Datta," "Dayadhvam," "Damyata," alluding to the fable of the thunder in the Upanishads. The translations of these words into the English imperatives is as follows "give," "sympathize," and "control" (Davidson 130). In short, these key words, the thunder sermon so to speak, are Eliot's suggestion for the restoration of a decayed culture; for the rebirth of the wasteland, what he believes is necessary for salvation. And, the irony is that this lesson is brought to

Western audiences from an Eastern culture; an indication that human beings share the same concerns and same solutions can work for all humanity. From death-in-life to death to rebirth, Eliot, through these water symbols, has shown in his poem that "if The Waste Land is the dead land, it is not that it is incapable of springing to life; it is that the hero must desire life. Otherwise, all is lost inasmuch as the human element is concerned" (Murphy 455). The revival necessitates sacrifice; that of giving, controlling and having compassion for others.

> True control is exerted not through force and a master, but by self-discipline and persuasion of others. Yet can the strutting will restrain itself by its own act? Can modern appetites, so long unchecked—so long gorged on blood and foulness, as during the War—be confined once more to their proper place? We have indulged the libido; now can we return to the other kind of freedom, *voluntas*—to Cicero's ordered and willed freedom? Our desires are insatiable, and the thunder is distant. (Kirk 75-76)

Such a lesson may be hard to realize by a post-World War generation, but it is the only way out according to the poet.

3- Al-Nawwab's Water Symbolism

In order to examine Mudaffar al-Nawwab's poem, one must refer to his life first. Al-Nawwab, one of the famous Iraqi poets and political critic, was born in Iraq, Baghdad in 1934, to a well-known aristocratic, literary and artistic family. He started to write poetry at an early age. He earned his bachelor from the University of Baghdad/ College of Arts in Arabic language. He was appointed as a teacher, but was soon fired for political reasons. Because he joined the Communist Party, which was then prohibited, he was prosecuted and arrested several times, even sentenced to death, but was mitigated to life sentence. He spent some time in prison until he managed to escape through digging a tunnel along with his fellow prisoners. This time he left his homeland for ever, remaining an exile in several Arab countries such as Lebanon, Syria, and Egypt. He also travelled to some European countries like France and Greece (Yaseen 15-29). No matter where he stayed, al-Nawwab remained faithful to his country, to his revolutionary principles, and to the causes of the Arab world. A world that he lamented for its continuous oppression and suppression of its own peoples. He was especially harsh on the Arab leaders to the extent of obscenity, and whom he considered more obscene than his language about them. And, because he never wavered or bargained his revolutionary stance, he remained an exile for the rest of his life. This is why he is sometimes referred to as the poet of "exile and loss" (Baban). Al-Nawwab died on 20 May, 2022.

Al-Nawwab's "Quira'at un fi Daftar al-Matar" [A Reading in the Notebook of Rain] was written in 1969, when he was already away from his homeland, a fugitive suffering all kinds of estrangement, a phenomenon common to many famous Arab poets such as Mahmoud Darwish, Ahmed Matar, Sa'di Yousif and Badr Shakir al-Sayyab, to name but a few. Like these poets, al-Nawwab condemned the lack of freedom, the dictatorship of Arab leaders and the deteriorating conditions of the Arab developing countries. The poem reads like a mourning, an outcry; or rather an [owl's whooping] (صـيحة بوم) (Al-Nawwab's Selected Poems, (Translated by al-Zubbaidi, and so all subsequent translations) 39), as the poet describes it in his poem, begins in a nocturnal atmosphere:

[At Night, the seagull is lost, at night	في الليل، يضيع النورس في الليل
The boat is lost.. at night	القارب في الليل
The eyes of my shoes sniff a woman's steps at night	و عيون حذائي تشتم خطى امرأة في الليل
A woman who is no more than a boat	امرأة ليست اكثر من زورق
To cross the night	لعبور الليل
O Woman of Night! I am a man who fought with a defeated army	يا امرأة الليل انا رجل حاربت بجيش مهزوم
In my heart is an owl's whooping.]	في قلبي صيحة بوم

(39)

The speaker invokes water imagery without mentioning "water" itself, but things associated with it: the gull and the boat. A sense of loss is created from the very first lines. It is nighttime, and he is trying to do something that would pass a long and tedious night, the night [of the broken generation] (الجيل المكسـور) (39), even if that be a [Woman of Night] (امرأة الليل) (39), to whom he may confide his heart-rending agony; an outcry of a defeated man. The sense of betrayal and defeat is conveyed in a powerful image: [Our leaders shook hands with the enemy, while we were still fighting/ We saw them sleeping at the other army, while the Army was still fighting] (صـــافح قادتنا الأعداء و نحن نحارب/ و رأيناهم ناموا في الجيش الآخر و نحن نحارب) (39), and having known the catastrophe, is now defeated looking for a [brothel] (مبغى) and [a boat] (39) (قارب) to rent.

The readers learn that the speaker is at Al-Zaytoona Café (a coastal district in Beirut, Lebanon), where there is [a window for strangers/ Wherein the wave is wailing/ Wherein my kinsmen/ Where men are fishing fingers of strangers' children/ We are still weak humans] (40) (شباك للغرباء/ تبكي الموجة فيه/ أهلي فيه/ و رجال فيه بصـــيدون أصـــابع أطفال غرباء). It is such a tumultuous world, where waves are wailing, and the strong eats the weak

just like the big sea creatures hunt one another according to their sizes, with a silly justification: [We are still weak humans] (40) (ما زلنا بشـرا ضـعفاء), acting on their instincts! It is a cruel world governed by jungle law, and in such a sea journey, looking for his home, the speaker wonders [where would the ebb leave] (40) (أين سـيتركني الجزر) him. This will certainly be a painful journey through "the path of tears"(40) (درب الدمع), but what he is sure of is that he will not give in. He confesses that he has [no home where [he] may take [his] weariness off] (43) (لا املـك بيتـا انزع فيـه تعبي), but he assures all that the rain shall come, and it is the speaker who will bring the good news:

[For I am like lightening which brings good tidings to earth	لكني كالبرق أبشر بالأرض
That the rain shall come	وأبشر ان الأمطار ستأتي
Shall wash away from our painting all defeated faces	وستغسل من لوحتنا كل وجوه المهزومين
Shat wash the one who searches for a brothel in his own defeat	وستغسل من يبحث في خيبته عن مبغى
Shall wash with warm rain the seagull's wing	وستغسل بالمطر الدافئ جنح النورس
The home of our beloved ones…] (43)	وبيوت أحبتنا…

The speaker then ponders on the poor conditions of his country, wondering why would a place like the Iraqi Marshes suffer from hunger. The Iraqi Marshes, also called the Mesopotamian, are wetlands that are considered heritage sites, but have always been neglected by the successive Iraqi regimes, and there have been attempts to dry them from time to time. The people of the marshes have always suffered from hunger and miserable living conditions. How come, the speaker asks, that three rivers are not enough to quench people's hunger and thirst. It is a shame on everybody's forehead. No revolutionist would accept that. The revolutionist is assuring his nation, like the lightening, that the rain would soon come, wiping off all defeated faces, and washing the gull's wings. The gull that was lost on the beginning of the poem may find its way at last.

The revolutionist has done all he can for his home land, for his own people. He describes the agonies he bore like the one who carries the cross. [And I came from the farthermost sorrow/ Heralding/ The Savior and the man] (50-51) ((من أقصـى الحزن أتيت أبشـر/بالإنسـان و بالمنقذ This Savior, he imagines may come out of water. Water here symbolizes the unknown that could hide the candles of hope, although a faint one. He looks at his homeland as a promised rain, a promise given by sunshine, which frequently lies. However, the speaker realizes that homeland itself is in estrangement:

[O my Homeland! You seem to be estrangement — يا وطني وكأنك في غربة
As if you are looking in my heart for a home — وكأنك تبحث في قلبي عن وطن انت
To shelter you — ليؤويك
We are both homeless, O my Homeland!] — نحن الاثنان بلا وطن يا وطني (46)

Al-Nawwab, therefore, uses water symbols in the form of the sea, the river and the rain. The sea for him is the world of estrangement, of the lost gull, the journey to the unknown. The river is associated with his homeland, whereas the rain is the hope that he awaits to wash away the sadness and the suffering, the moment that would he and his homeland, who have been done injustice to, may be reunited and settled.

4- Conclusion

As presented above, both Eliot and al-Nawwab use water symbolism but in two different contexts. They are both concerned with the issues of their ages: Eliot, through the use of an Arthurian legend which is peculiar to the European culture, envisions a spiritual and cultural drought, a wasteland, that could be revitalized by considering what the "Thunder" say: Give, Sympathize, and Control. The sea is a reminder of death, a symbol of life and death; and, the river is a reminder of a past glory.

Al-Nawab, however, employs water symbolism to express his outrage for a corrupted homeland, lamenting not only his own, but also his homeland's estrangement. They are both victims of a cruel policy; one that has led to all kinds of suffering; social and political injustices. To him, [The water is a passage for strangers] (43) (الماء طريق الغرباء). It is an escape to the unknown, a journey to look for a shelter. Rain, which is not a common phenomenon to Arab Gulf countries including his homeland (Iraq), is a persistent desire and a hope that may bring welfare for his homeland, but, like the lightening, it is the revolutionist that heralds such a hope. While Eliot's water symbolism is universal, one that stands for fertility and salvation, al-Nawwab's water symbolism is far more sophisticated.

Works Cited:

1. Al-Nawwab, M. (2017). Selected Poems. (H. K. al-Zubbaidi, Trans.) Baghdad: The General Union of Iraqi Writers.

2. Baban, S. H. (2021, 1 27). "I Am Tired of Me, Unable to Hold On" This is How al-Nawwab Summarized his Conflict with Illness . Retrieved 4 20, 2022, from Aljazeera.net: https://www.aljazeera.net/news/cultureandart/2021/1/27/%D9%85%D9%8F%D8%AA%D8%B9%D8%A8%D9%8C-%D9%85%D9%86%D9%91%D9%8A-%D9%88%D9%84%D8%A7-%D8%A3%D9%82%D9%88%D9%89-%D8%B9%D9%84%D9%89-%D8%AD%D9%85%D9%84%D9%8A-%D9%87%D9%83%D8%B0%D8%A7
3. Davidson, H. (1994). Improper Desire: Reading The Waste Land. In A. D. Moody (Ed.), The Cambridge Companion to T.S. Eliot (pp. 121-131). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
4. Eliot, T. S. (1963). Collected Poems 1909-1962. New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, Inc. .
5. Eliot, T. S. (1999). The Sacred Wood: Essays On Poetry and Criticism. New York: Bartleby.
6. Kirk, R. (2008). Eliot and His Age: T. S. Eliot's Moral Imagination (2nd ed.). Wilmington: ISI.
7. Murphy, R. E. (2007). A Critical Companion to T. S. Eliot: A Literary Reference to his life and works. New York: Infobase.
8. Raine, C. (2006). T. S. Eliot. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
9. Scofield, M. (1997). T. S. Eliot: The Poems. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
10. Yaseen, B. (2003). Mudhaffar al-Nawwab: Hayatuhu wa Shi'iruhu [Mudhaffar al-Nawwab: His Life and Poetry]. Quom: Al-Ghadeer.