

Manifestations of the Sea in Contemporary Palestinian Poetry: A Critical Study of Vision and Poetic Formation

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Abstract :

The sea constitutes one of the most recurrent spatial motifs in contemporary Arabic poetry and lies at the heart of the thematic meanings embedded in its image. In itself, it is a space for poetic contemplation that seeks the meaning of homeland through the dialectic of land and exile. Since the sea and the spatial forms associated with it—waves, ports, ships, sails, and others—are signs of departure and distance from the land, owing to the images of travel and adventure into the unknown that have become attached to it in collective memory and poetic imagination, it simultaneously remains a sign of awaiting return and returnees, because it has stored within itself the hopes and dreams of exiles for whom anticipation of the moment of return has remained an eternal preoccupation.

Like other natural phenomena, the sea enters poetry and its meaning and significance expand beyond mere description toward connotations associated with the poet's psychological states and the atmosphere surrounding the text. In representations of the sea, these connotations are often similar. Among the most important meanings of the sea encountered in the poetry under consideration are the poetics of the sea, anxiety and disturbance, and fear and the unknown—features intrinsically associated with the sea. The connotations of anxiety and disturbance in the sea correspond to the poet's psychological state.

Keywords: manifestations; sea; construction; poetic formation; contemporary Palestinian poem.

Introduction:

Poetry possesses its own authority and its capacity to exert influence through innovative linguistic cues that privilege one poetic pattern over another according to the operation of seduction and the pleasure it generates in the recipient. Since poetry is an aesthetic translation of feeling into

an aesthetic linguistic form, seduction becomes a touchstone for an influential aesthetic reception of poetry. What matters here, however, is to recognize that the poetic act's practice of the ritual of seduction is not confined to the recipient alone. In fact, the creator is also subject to this practice at the moment of creation: language exercises its fascination and seduction upon the poet, who falls under the spell of words and the movement of mutually reinforcing expressions that create enchanting and shifting meanings, transmitting their beauty and splendor into the psyche of the reader, who continually thirsts for creativity in the poetic text that distinguishes itself from others (Shartah, n.d.-a, p. 102).

Poetry is thus a linguistic construction of a special kind, in which signifiers acquire their value from the poet's skill in employing them aesthetically within the poetic context and in generating meanings that exceed their lexical contents toward broader and more expansive horizons. They thereby become floating symbols that surprise and elude the recipient, compelling the reader to rediscover the world of language anew in all its freshness and brilliance. In other words, the poet's skill lies in the ability to invoke the poetic function of language within poetic discourse (Musa, 2006, p. 403).

It is extremely difficult to delimit the importance of freedom for the creator; it may be the most important factor in producing healthy literature—literature that does not suffer from malnutrition, police stations, and instruments of censorship lodged in the creator's mind at the moment of writing, which are the most dangerous of all. Nevertheless, we must realize that creativity is like a cloud compressed and fused within the core of the earth: however hard the crust pressing upon it may be, it must find an outlet through which to emerge onto the earth's surface, initially filling the world with light, fire, and destruction, only later to be transformed into goodness, giving, and renewal of the soil (Shartah, 2017, p. 62).

The poet Muin Bseiso says in the poem "The Piano":

*A poem descended from my hand,
to the sea—ah, my new ship!
The sea is an ancient lover; how many vessels have shattered upon its bed.
The sea is an ancient poet; how many stars have shattered upon its bed.
(Bseiso, 1987, p. 571)*

The transformations of the sea in Muin Bseiso's imagination extend until it becomes identified with the poem when he says, "A poem descended from my hand." The poet depicts place through the movement emanating from the verb "descended," which constitutes a movement toward the world of the self, since descent carries the meaning of entering into something, a meaning that the image defines through being-in-the-sea ("descended to the sea"). Yet the strangeness arises from the unexpected relationship joining the poem and the sea. The scene thereby acquires a new dimension assumed by the poetic text itself, so that the poem becomes a vehicle of estrangement, astonishment, vision, and contemplation; it becomes the poet's ship for sailing. Through these transformations, the image produces a new world, while the self, through its contemplations, opens a distinctive poetic universe that gives an additional meaning to existence in place (Majnah, 2010, p. 140).

An evocative creative artwork is characterized by its suggestive elusiveness and its changing aesthetic values according to the degree and depth of vision and the slippage within its suggestiveness. The accomplished artist is one who possesses an elusive vision that branches throughout the artistic product, revealing the renewed suggestions it conceals and allowing them to grow continuously. On this basis, the semantic and aesthetic values of the poem change in accordance with the new developments of vision (Shartah, n.d.-b, p. 29).

The Palestinian poet Fadwa Tuqan says:

*For your love all my seasons have filled
and grown generous with abundant fruit and flowers.
For your love my horizons are studded,
their radiance flourishing upon their naked breast.
For your love I keep this night awake,
intoxicated, entrusting the night with my secrets.
I go on with memory, and it carries me
upon its wing to the path, to the home.
I close my eyelids upon a dream,
glowing with breath and fragrance.
Here you are: in your eyes a storm
sweeps over me, a tempest's gust.
Here you are: a sea that takes me
within its two waves with a tyrant's force.
Here you are—and here am I.
(Tuqan, 1993, p. 176)*

We find that the most important transformation affecting the poetic word occurs at the semantic level. Many borrowed terms—often drawn from contemporary languages of philosophy, nature, psychology, theology, or mythology—have shed their familiar and conventional linguistic meanings and the ideas and feelings usually associated with them, becoming signs within the new poetic expression. With their newly acquired meanings, these terms constitute keys to the contemporary poet's poetic world and enable the reader to grasp and follow the content of contemporary production in a manner appropriate to it (Salih, n.d., p. 168).

When the contemporary poet writes, the subject is apprehended first through a subjective creative perception before being apprehended verbally, thereby removing it from the familiar and commonplace. The poet thus adopts a construction marked by poetic openness, which makes the contemporary poem depart from every ready-made mold. The poet aspires to a poem governed by artistic vision, which varies according to the plurality of poetic selves, ensuring the poem's continuity and the pursuit of an artistic signification that is transformed within the poetic text into signifiers, each of which constructs its own imagistic and conceptual system. The contemporary poet's task is not to search for the appearances and superficial forms of things, but rather to seek their essence and their absolute dimension. The poet is like an artist who continually reveals the

absolute and the essence and reproduces reality in a different, new, and singular manner characterized by distinction and creativity (Fattuh, n.d., p. 276).

He also says:

*And all your life you search for a ship and for a hero.
My hand is the ship whose
long eyelashes you will draw one night.
My poem is short.
(Bseiso, 1987, p. 571)*

The poem—or imagination—is the set of places and the sea that the poet opens onto his existence and estrangement in place. It consequently acquires its spatial dimensions from the movement of astonishment that transforms it into semantic spaces addressing the problematic of the self's existence. The poem is a form of astonishment before the world and, at the same time, the means by which that astonishment and the unexpected are produced. The means through which textual astonishment is achieved can only be the contemplations of the self and visions that penetrate the familiar. By becoming a spatial phenomenon, the poem produces a world of places that merges within the dialectical relationship among poem, ship, and sea. The image is deepened by the skill of metaphor; therefore, the poet dwells on this expressive image and continues to deepen his contemplations through the attitudes and conceptions of the sea and life retained in memory. Astonishment and surprise are transformed into anxiety, perplexity, and fear of the awaited unknown. The poet is wary of the violence of the sea, seeing it as “an ancient lover” upon whose bed vessels have shattered and also as “an ancient poet” upon whose bed stars have shattered. The sea thus enters spatial and semantic paradoxes permeated by fear and caution, since the ship lacks its hero and the leader of its destination: “And all your life you search for a ship and for a hero.” At the level of the poem, the image of the sea consequently settles within binary tensions of presence and absence, reality and imagination, return and estrangement (Majnah, 2010, p. 140).

The true creator is one who possesses the ability to shape language aesthetically beyond the framework of the familiar. To the extent that language deviates from the common and conventional, it achieves poetic value, in Jean Cohen's view; the presence of syntactic deviation in the poetic text can make its language radiant and exciting, capable of exercising an authority over the reader through surprise and strangeness (Khadir Hamad, n.d., p. 65).

*Mother, when I took from my provisions and my supplies,
and when I cast my heart into Sinbad's hands,
I saw the signs of sins along my path,
and it pained me to ride the sea without struggle.
But... ah, my mother,
when I sailed the sea of shame, I was exhausted
by longing for the land...
(Fuda, n.d., pp. 85–86)*

After the poet Ali Fuda destabilizes Sinbad's commonly known history, Sinbad is no longer merely a traveler who rides through the terrors of the sea and confronts only physical difficulties and hardships. His sufferings are no longer merely sensory and bodily; rather, they become spiritual anguish and an inner experience marked by severe pain and wounding. Once the poet extracts Sinbad from his far-reaching semantic field, he becomes a personal symbol within the experience of the contemporary Palestinian poet (Al-Alaq, n.d.-a, p. 61).

An example is his statement in the poem "The Hour Has Struck":

*She is like the sea: her tide is the roaring hope of long years, and despair is ebb;
it reveals the rock when it retreats with the wave, yet the rock saves the drowning person.
(Bseiso, 1987, p. 63)*

The poet sets the inanimate into motion and humanizes lifeless things by infusing them with the spirit of human emotion, existential feeling, and fluctuating sensation, and by bestowing movement upon silent things that do not ordinarily admit movement. From them, the poet creates a degree of identification, fusion, and immersion in sensation and perception. In other words, the poet animates inert objects so that they may participate with him in resistance (Shartah, 2018, p. 97).

The general atmosphere of the poetic text and the difficult situation experienced by our poet Muin Bseiso—loneliness, loss, and waiting—appear to have led him to choose a new and unfamiliar structure. The unfamiliar construction reflects a psychological state and an emotional position that reveal the magnitude of the poet's suffering. Selection is an intentional process through which the poet arouses the recipient's awareness and provokes the reader into becoming more actively engaged with the text. Accordingly, selection must be conscious rather than spontaneous or random. Human beings naturally belong on land, whereas the sea is not what human nature ordinarily finds familiar; therefore, when a person goes to sea, fear and disturbance arise because of the vast expanse of water surrounding the person and the remoteness of its horizon (Abu al-Adous, n.d., p. 178).

This is what we observe in his poem "The Besieged City":

*The sea tells the stars the story of the imprisoned homeland,
and night, like a beggar, knocks with tears and moaning
at Gaza's doors, closed upon the sorrowful people.
It stirs the living who slept upon the ruins of my years,
as though they were a grave struck by the hands of grave-diggers.
The lights of morning almost emerge from the intensity of torment
and chase the night, which still retains abundant youth;
but their time has not yet come, nor has the time for departure.
The mighty giant has covered his lofty head with dust.
(Bseiso, 1987, p. 53)*

This is a discourse that personifies inert sensory materials and endows them with human qualities and actions. Personification is an ancient artistic device known to Arabic poetry and world poetry since their earliest periods. It is based on embodying abstract meanings and static manifestations of nature in the form of living beings that feel, move, and pulse with life. The sea is

not a static natural scene like a mountain or desert sand; rather, it is a moving and turbulent world, and its movement and turbulence arouse thoughts of poetry and contemplation in the soul according to the poet's psychological state (Abdullah, n.d., p. 99).

The deviation occurring here serves the text first by conferring aesthetic value upon it and serves the reader, on the other hand, through the psychological and intellectual pleasure it leaves behind. The value of deviation lies in its symbolization of an enduring conflict between language and the human being: the human being is unable to accept all of language's modes, while language is unable to respond to all human needs. This is what prompted Muin Bseiso toward deviation, for it involves a kind of maneuvering through which he compensates for both his own limitations and those of language (Al-Atiyyah, 2014, p. 112).

"Because poetic language of a symbolic character is more suggestive and seductive to the recipient, who attempts to grasp its eruptions, flows, and movements beyond the lexical system of language, it thereby becomes a principal key to entering the world of poetry" (Al-Damur, n.d., p. 1265).

Mahmoud Darwish says:

*Let us be kind! Take me to the sea at
sunset, so I may hear what the sea says to you
when it returns to itself, calm, calm.
I will not change what is within me. I will slip into a wave
and say: Take me to the sea once again. This is what
the fearful do to themselves: they go to
the sea when a star that burned itself in the sky torments them.
(Darwish, n.d.)*

The contemporary Palestinian poet has drawn from the wellspring of symbols of every kind artistic images that have enriched poetic texts and deepened them intellectually and aesthetically. The use of the symbol of the "sea" in poetry is evidence, on the one hand, of the depth of the poet's culture and, on the other, of intellectual maturity. A poet who wishes to employ symbol in poetry must possess broad culture and extensive experience, because the poetic symbol is intimately connected to the emotional experience endured by the poet, an experience that grants things a special significance (Mulla Ibrahim, n.d., p. 94).

It is as though the poet's task has come to consist, first, in revealing the symbolism and signification of the sea. The poet does not, of course, create it out of nothing, but opens dimensions from outside it. Likewise, when the moment of reception occurs, the sea symbolizes what lies within the recipient, enabling the recipient to discover its meanings through personal experience and feeling, by means of what the symbol achieves at the moment when creativity and reception meet. The poet Tawfiq Zayyad says in his poem "The Singer":

*And I ride every raging sea
until I gather the fragrance
at the shores of lilac.
I am humanity in the size of one human being—*

shall I ever rest?

(Zayyad, 1987, pp. 240–241)

The sea represents a symbol of revolution through the expression “raging sea,” because rage carries an explicit force that moves from symbol toward reality. The poet senses the bitterness of reality under an occupation that kills the dream and dismembers the homeland. These signifiers contribute to the length of the painful journey, whose bitterness is equivalent to accumulated ages of time, during which the poet seeks to reach a shore upon which to rest—a shore that, at the moment of arrival, appears inhabited by accumulated old worries and sorrows (Abu Jahjuh, 2018, p. 14).

The success of the aesthetic adventure derives from the element of surprise and astonishment in the poetic text. Hence the statement that “absolute familiarity with the real thing is fatal to aesthetic taste.” In other words, what kills poetry is habitualness, whereas what creates poetry and elevates it aesthetically is suddenness, surprise, and the unexpected. Therefore, the repeated circulation of what is familiar kills aesthetic taste and the creative sensibility of both recipient and creator (Shartah, 2017, p. 65).

The sea, as a natural phenomenon laden with abundant symbolic meanings, does not remain restricted by a single, constraining signification that limits its suggestive materiality or directs it toward one semantic path that admits neither plurality nor fragmentation. Rather, it encompasses an overflow of suggestions (Al-Alaq, n.d.-b, p. 58).

Conclusion:

Since ancient times, the sea has been associated with awe. Human beings look upon the seemingly infinite expanse of water before them, and various, conflicting thoughts arise within their souls.

The image of the sea has fascinated—and continues to fascinate—the reader, tempting the reader to explore its reservoir of knowledge, its implicit cultural patterns, and its spatial relations associated with themes of wandering, exile, adventure, return, belonging, existence, and other meanings and dimensions encompassed by the spatiality of the sea within the body of the text. Just as poets linked this spatial image to journeying and contemplation, they also deployed it across their various conceptions.

The creator’s memory is a sea in whose depths lie multiple sayings and actions. The sea is a rich source of energies and possibilities that has helped the contemporary Palestinian poet reveal poetic vision and convey its various dimensions.

The contemporary Palestinian poet has used the “sea” in poetry, yet did not intend merely its literal or direct denotative level as a physical sea; rather, the poet intended its suggestive and symbolic meaning.

The image of waves and their turbulence has continued to signify the anxious and disturbed psyche; anxiety may also be accompanied by rebellion and aversion toward the psychological condition that holds the poet captive.

The contemporary Palestinian poetic lexicon reveals the powerful presence of contemporary vocabulary that expresses the concerns and spaces of the contemporary condition in all its manifestations, forms, and cultural sensitivities.

The contemporary Palestinian poet has attempted to develop vocabulary and meanings and to renew structures and modes of disclosure and expression in order to present an integrated image of the vitality of poetic signification, the means of its development and transformation, and its capacity to keep pace with the age.

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