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INDIVIDUALITY AS A DEMOCRATIC VISTA OF ABDULLAH AL-BARADDOUNI'S
POETRY: A READING IN THE POEM OF ABU TAMMAM AND ARABISM OF TODAY

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ABSTRACT

Since the outset of his literary experience, Abdullah Al-Baraddouni's poetry had elaborately discussed the key issues concerned with individuality as a sacred right that it should be fully pursued and practiced. Therefore, "self" from Al-Baraddouni's perspective is of paramount significance in which he deals with it in terms of time and place. The poet attempted to discuss the sociopolitical situations in Yemen and Arab spheres adopting "self" and "others" within two different historical periods through which Al-Baraddouni managed to enumerate the reasons of self's decadence, degradation and feebleness with reference to the Arab identity nowadays and then. Throughout the poem, there are so many famous historical figures, places and facts that are well mentioned and envisioned as and emphasis on the necessity of self-preference for having a better and stronger democratic nation.

Keywords: individuality, democracy, self, time, Place, sociopolitical situations, identity and nation.

1. Introduction

1.1. Biography of Abdullah Al-Baraddouni

Abdullah Al-Baraddouni (1929–1999) a Yemeni modern poet and an intellectual figure, was born in Zirajah, Baraddoun in Dhamar, Yemen. He was afflicted with Smallpox at the age of six leaving him blind, and began school in his village one year later. Despite the black and blue that he ran across in the school way, he insisted on keeping his studying in al-Milamah.¹ He started writing, reading and memorizing the Holy Quran under the supervision of Sheikh Yahya Hussein al-Qhadi, then he moved to a village named al-Mahallah, in Anis District, southeast of Dhamar City, where he completed the primary school. After that, he moved to Shamsia School², where he studied the legal sciences such as jurisprudence and the Arabic Language sciences such as grammar and rhetoric. Then he continued his educational process and moved to Dar al-Uloun in Sanaa, where he achieved his aim. "The people are completely different as I got the chance to meet the intellectuals, historians, writers, and poets", the poet stated. He added, "My real poetic life starts from Sana'a City in 1949 so far" (Mashoukh 23). He graduated from Dar al-Uloun in 1951.

¹Almilamah, is a small school where children memorize the Holy Quran, besides learning reading and writing.

² A mosque, which was named after Imam Shams Al-Dain bin Sharaf Al-dain 1506 - 1557 A.D.

He was appointed to various official posts. He published 12 volumes of poetry and six books on topics ranging from literature to politics and folklore. Because of his critical writings, Al-Baraddouni was put in prison for some period of time during the 1950s, 60s, and 70s. Besides being a prominent poet, he was also a distinguished intellectual in local and Arab cultural affairs. He was also a link between modernity and Arabic heritage. His poetry is a profound analysis of the realities of the Arabs life, with all its triumphs, advances, and defeats. He is considered by many to be one of the greatest Arab poets of the twentieth century.

1.2. About the Poem of "Abu Tammam and the Arabism of Today"

"*Abu Tammam and the Arabism of Today*" (أبو تميم و عروبة اليوم) is a memorable poem that was addressed by Abdullah Al-Baraddouni in a Poetic Festival of Abu Tammam,³ which was held in Mosul, Iraq in 1971, in recognition of Abu Tammam's poetic contributions. It was the first participation ever outside Yemen, where Al-Baraddouni attained his popularity all over the Arab world, and was awarded Abu Tammam Festival's award.

1.3. Al-Baraddouni and Concept of Time and Place

The self in Albaraddouni's poetry is confined to a certain time and place, in which the time is the poet's time with all its ups and downs, and so is the concept of place represented in Yemen and Arab states as actual setting. Therefore, self is well envisioned as a democratic vista and an embodiment of Yemen and Arab identities. The concepts of place and time are considered very essential components in Al-Baraddouni's poetry, so that most of Al-Baraddouni's poetic volumes explicitly marked the concepts of time and place. The titles of these volumes are written in adverbial and propositional phrases "*Travelling to the Green Days*" and "*In the Way of Dawn*" are assuring the existing self through time. Likewise, volumes such as "*From the Land of Bilqees*", "*The City of Tomorrow*" and "*For the Eyes of Bilqees's Mother*", are all allegorical images of "Yemen", such locative terms that signify to a missing identity that the poet looks for. Consequently, the poet tries to make some radical changes in his society that is why he describes self differently. The self in Al-Baraddouni's point of view is strongly related to the life's issues. The poet used a satirical language to reflect the current Arab situations. He divided the self into three pyramidal phases of times. The first one is the longing to the self of the poet himself; the second phase is the self of Arabic identity, and the longing to the past Arabic period is the third phase. So did the poet with the concept of place, he started with the Yemeni issues and ended with the Arabic regions.

1.4. Al-Baraddouni and Employment of Intertextuality Through the poem of "Abu Tammam and Arabism of Today".

Intertextuality in Arabic Literature is a critical term which means a similarity between a text and other texts or between several texts (Definition of Intertextuality). According to Kaelyn Barron who stated that Intertextuality refers to the interrelationships between a particular text and other texts, and it does not mean the influence of one text on another (Barron). She further added that the "Deliberate Intertextuality intentionally borrows from other texts, usually through allusions, parody, or symbolism". Furthermore, Tawfeq Qureirah defines Intertextuality as "Relying a text on any other ancient prosaic and poetic texts" (Qureirah 16). Throughout Al-Baraddouni's poem, a reader may notice that Al-Baraddouni was influenced by the Abbasid-era Arab poet, Abu Tammam (Habib Bin Awos) as Al-Baraddouni's poem is an imitation of Habib bin Awos's poem "*Conquest of Amorium*" that was addressed by Habib Bin Awos in Al-mutasim's favor, an Abbasid Caliphate, who led personally Sack of Amorium Battle, one of the Arab-Byzantine Wars in 838 A.D., which ended with a decisive victory for Almutasim's army (Wikipedia). However, Al-Baraddouni has managed to employ Intertextuality elegantly, he deliberately echoed Abu Tammam's words not for the sake of imitation, but rather to serve Al-Baraddouni's goal. As the poem "*Conquest of Amorium*" for Habib Bin Aows is an embodiment of Arabs' grandeur and chivalry during Abbasid era. Abu Tammam, the Abbasid Arab Poet has praised Al-Mutasim's heroic role as a preserver of Arabic dignity and identity; on the contrary, Al-Baraddouni's poem "*Abu Tammam and the Arabism of Today*" is an allusion to the destructive and humiliating roles of Arab leaders nowadays towards the rights and issues of their nations that are being abused and violated represented by injustice, repression and slavery.

³ Abu Tammam (788–845), full name Habib ibn Awos Al-Ta'i was an Abbasid-era Arab poet and a Muslim convert born to Christian parents, best known for his anthology of Arabic poetry, *Hamasa*

2. Discussion of the Poem

Al-Baraddouni's poem "Abu Tammam and the Arabism of Today" is a pastiche of Habib Bin Awos's poem "Conquest of Amorium". We can notice that Al-Baraddouni uses the method of "talking through the character" in what is known as "The mask", in which the poet is fully identified with the character and probes its inner meaning. This is considered the richest technical way and the most suggestive one. He further uses the style of "talking to the character", in which the relationship between the poet and the character is that of confrontation based on dialectics. Sometimes such a relation is between the poet and himself with, another time it is between the poet's ego and that of the other. The third method is "Talking about the character" in which the poet uses the third person pronouns and he becomes a narrator using the way of telling stories (Aown 3).

Al-Baraddouni compares the difference between nowadays and that time by showing us a vast moral gap between the Arabs then and the Arabs during the twentieth century. He discusses the Arabic situations in different eras. The main idea of this poem is to reflect the current images of the Arab nation during his day and even nowadays, in which the poet conducted the objective style, which depends on showing some images and counterpart images. Abu Tammam, the poet, inaugurated his poem by saying:

A sword's news is more unfeigned than that of letters, السيف أصدق أنباء من الكتب

Its sharpness is a frontier between seriousness and mockery. في حده الحد بين الجد و اللعب

(Altabraizi , 347)

However, Al-Baraddouni's preface in his poem is quite different from Abu Tammam's poem in terms of perception and meaning. Al-Baraddouni does not echo what Abu Tammam says regarding the credibility and incredibility of swords. According to Abu Tammam, a sword is a symbol of triumph, whereas to Al-Baraddouni it is portrayed as a tool of injustice and aggressiveness.

How truthful a sword is if not unsheathed for a lie ما أصدق السيف إن لم ينضه الكذب

And how deceitful if not achieve its anger واكذب السيف إن لم يصدق الغضب

The ugliest victory is that of the powerful, وأقبح النصر... نصر الأقوياء

Who merely understand how much they sold and gained. بلا فهم... سوى كم باعوا وكم كسبوا

Worse than ignorance is a little and soothing knowledge, أدهى من الجهل علم يطمئن إلى

Sub humans, with some knowledge, have tyrannized and usurped, أنصاف ناس طغوا بالعلم واغتصبوا

They said they are the finer human, but they only ate, قالوا: هم البشر الأرقى وما أكلوا

And drank the humans' rights. شربوا كما أكلوا الإنسان أو شربوا

(Al-Baraddouni ,Lines 1-5,595)

Hence, the victory of those "sub humans" and the little knowledge they have is worse than illiteracy, and so, the tyrannical people are all features of a lying sword. As mentioned earlier, there is a comparison between two different eras (unity of time) the first period embodies prosperity and a flourishing time of the Islamic uprising of Arab regions (unity of place). And another period, the modern time, that is witnessing feebleness and decadence and this is the reason why the poet describes the sword as such. The first three verses in the above quotation are overlapped. The poet echoes Abu Tammam regarding the features of a sword, however, the second and third parts of poem are quite the opposite in which the main idea of the poem discusses the current modern situations of Arab regions. Here, the poet starts by raising questions, which is a very famous technique of Al-Baraddouni, especially in this poem. The poem is rich in various poetic structure constituents such as questions, dialogue, and monologue, which all enrich the beauty and freshness of the poem. The poet begins the second part of the poem by some questions, Al-Baraddouni asks:

Oh, Abu Tammam, what happened? Why do you ask me? ماذا جرى يا أبا تمام تسألني

Excuse me, I will tell, ask not the reason, عفواً سأروي... ولا تسأل و ما السبب

A question bleeds of shyness, when asked, يدمي السؤال حياءً حين نسأله

How comes that Haifa and Naqab are welcoming the enemy? كيف احتفت بالعدى (حيفا) والنقب؟⁴

(Al-Baraddouni, line 6-7,595).

Throughout the quoted lines, Al-Baraddouni is talking to the character through his nickname in order to establish a dialogue by which he can reveal his complaint on the one hand and to show the anachronism between the age of Abu Tammam and Al-Baraddouni's age on the other hand. In the second line, there is a simultaneous exaggeration and a personification. The poet personifies the question as a human who is bleeding because of shyness and being embarrassed due to the critical situations that Arab nations are living in. Besides, the poem is written in the collective form which emphasizes the fact that the poet is speaking on behalf of all Arab regions regardless of the narrow national identities. However, the poet compares between two different eras: The first period dated back to the ninth century which is characterized as a powerful and prosperous age, and another period, the modern time that is described as being feeble and decadent. The poet talks about the current situation in general and Palestine in particular. The poem "Abu Tammam and Arabism of Today" is a good example that reflects what is going on along the Arab regions. The poet stands against the Israeli aggression that invaded the holiest Arabic land, Palestine. Throughout this poem, the poet wants to convey a message that, he addresses Arabic chivalry that is no more available by giving a realistic historical example that explains the "unity of time" and "unity of place".

Who is going to respond? Is it Almotasim's persistence!! من ذا يُلبي؟ أما إصرار معتصم؟

No, and more shameful is the crucifixion of Alafsheen⁶ كلا وأخزى من الافشين ما صُلبوا

(Al-Baraddouni, Line 9-10,596).

The poet brought together these two contrasted personalities purposely in order to convince the audience that he can display the Arab situation nowadays to Alafsheen, who was crucified by Almotasim as he deceived him. The poet embodies such historical scene to the modern time to show that all Arab leaders are deceptive. They left Palestine injured, and unrescued.

In addition to this, the poet does not criticize the Arab citizens, rather the rulers who have to be reproached. Their main concerns are their thrones and have no attention to the prosperity of their countries.

Our rulers, fight for protection, حكامنا إن تصدوا للحمى إقحموا

If they are confronted by the enemies, they withdraw, وإن تصدى له المستعمر انسحبوا

They furnish their eyes for the invaders, هم يفرشون لجيش الغزو أعينهم

And claim onslaught stability before they do, و يدعون وثوباً قبل أن يثبوا

They are rulers, though Washington is their government. الحاكمون وواشنطن حكومتهم

(Al-Baraddouni, Line 13-16,596).

It is a precise reading of the political scene which is enhanced by the exquisite feeling of Al-Baraddouni that conveyed to the Arab readers, especially when they look at the moral deterioration that plagued the Arab rulers. The poet portrays the scene of Arab regimes who consume great deal of money for equipping the armies but at critical times they are useless, not because of being afraid or weak, rather than the decision is not theirs. In the third part of the poem, there is another inquiry by the poet which gets the readers upset, though it is miserable situation that happened in the nineteenth century. The greatness of the poet clearly appears when he is able to explain and personify the reality, and his distinguished ability to foretell the future and its prediction besides. The tragic reality of the Arab nation is represented by Al-Baraddouni in a way he embodies Arab Identity which is part and parcel of this calamity.

⁴ Haifa and Alnagab are two Palestinian cities which were colonized by Israeli occupation

⁵ Almotasim is an Islamic successor or Caliph during Alabassid period. He revolted for a Muslim woman who sought his rescue and so he returned to save her dignity.

⁶ His name is Hyder bin Arouse, one of Almotasim's officers, he betrayed him, and was crucified by Almotasim.

What do you see Abu Tammam? Do our origins lie? Or can gold deny its root?

ماذا ترى يا أبا تمام هل كذبت أحسابنا؟ أو تناسى عرقه الذهب؟

Arabism of today does not reflect, عروبة اليوم أخرى لا ينم,

Any existence, name, color, or title, على وجودها اسم و لا لون و لا لقب,

Ninety thousand zealous soldiers assembled to Amorium تسعون ألفاً لعموية اتقدوا

To the seer, they said "we are meteors", وللمنجم قالوا: إننا الشهب,

It was said " wait the harvest of vineyard," but they waited not, قيل انتظار قطاف الكرم ما انتظروا,

For the ripeness of clusters, and rushed to fight, نضج العناقيد لكن قبلها التهبوا,

Today, they are ninety millions واليوم تسعون مليوناً وما بلغوا نضجاً

Yet, they reach not maturity, not knowing that

The grapes and the olives are already extracted. وقد عصر الزيتون والعنب.

(Al-Baraddouni, Line18-22,597)

The poet in the fourth part limits his talk between himself and Abu Tammam, the person to whom the poem was written in favor of. Al-Baraddouni echoes Abu Tammam's attitude throughout his poem. "Conquest of Amorium", where Abu Tammam says:

Ninety thousands soldiers as the sinister lions that their skins matured prior to the maturity of figs and grapes.
(AbuTammam 157)

تسعون ألفاً كأساد الشرى نضجت جلودهم قبل نضج التين والعنب

Al-Baraddouni was influenced by Abu Tammam in the above line due to two reasons; the first one is recognition of Abu Tammam's certainty of the victory of his army. The second reason is quite the opposite of the first reason, which is the submission and feebleness of rulers of nowadays. Despite the small number of the Islamic army under the leadership of Al-Motasim, who could defeat crusaders and take revenge to the Muslim woman that called him to rescue her. Unlike that time, the Arab armies nowadays exceed ninety millions; nevertheless, their presidents could not avenge their nations and recapture the looted land by the Zionist colonizers.

In the following lines, Al-Baraddouni complains to Abu Tammam regarding the miserable situation in Yemen. It is not as it was before; it is defected by tuberculosis and scabies which both make an allegorical image of the illiteracy and corruption that destroyed the country. Al-Baraddouni says:

Habib⁷, I came from Sana'a, carried by an eagle حبيب وافيت من صنعاء يحملني نسرأ

While the Arabs are gasping behind my ribs, وخلف ضلوعي يلهث العرب,

What shall I say about Sana'a, O father? ماذا أحث عن صنعاء يا أبتى?

She is a pretty city that tuberculosis and scabies are its lovers, مليحه عاشقاها السل و الجرب,

She died in Waddah's⁸ box pricelessly, ماتت بصندوق وضاح بلا ثمن,

But passion and songs never died in her heart, ولم يميت في حشاها العشق والطرب,

She was observing the dawn of revolution in order to resurrect, كانت تراقب صبح البعث فانبعثت,

In a dream, then it plunks to nap and monitor. في الحلم ثم ارتمت تغفو وترتقب.

Despite the meanness of shower rain, it became, لكنها رغم بخل الغيث ما برحت,

⁷Habib is the first name of the poet, Abu Tammam whom Albaraddouni is complaining to.

⁸Waddah is a very handsome Yemeni poet who was killed due to his flirtation with the wife of Abdulmalik bin Marwan, the king of Umayyad State. It was bad reputation death.

حبلى وفي بطنها قحطان أو كرب⁹. *Where she was left pregnant with Qahtan and Karib*

(Al-Baraddouni, line 24-28, 597)

The poet chooses to call his character through the first name without a nickname as we have seen previously and this choice which denotes that the poet wants to show the intimacy and the love he owes to the recipient from one hand, and on the other hand to convey to the character (Habib) two issues: The First one is a personal concern and the other one is public concerns of his homeland. Calling the recipient with his first name, Habib, reveals a kind of love between the poet and receiver. Furthermore, the omission of the solicitation article "Oh" indicates the strong relation between the addresser and the addressee. It also signifies to the depth of sadness that the poet feels towards his country.

The poet is talking to Abu Tammam, Habib, as he (Al-Baraddouni) came from Sanaa where the people are gasping and sighing because of pain and suffering. A metaphorical image reveals thirstiness and starvation. Also, the other image of Sana'a city where it is described as a sick lady suffering from tuberculosis and scabies, here the poet personifies the city of Sana'a as a pretty lady that is afflicted with dangerous diseases which are ironical images of poverty and illiteracy. The pretty lady (I.e. Sanaa) is buried in Waddah's box, which is legendary story. The poet chose this character (Waddah) because of the triviality of life, just as the triviality of this character. Nevertheless, the poet is optimistic because it is a common feature of modern poets who end their poems with a little hope. He says, even when she dies, there is a beautiful melody pregnant with Qahtan and Karib. These two classical heroes through of them the goodness and life bounty would come back.

Throughout the poem, there are two aspects: subjective and methodical. The subjective aspect is embodied in Al-Baraddouni's firm national perspective of the poet with reference to the issues of Arab nation by explaining his idea of how the Arabs are living and diagnosing the reasons of the poor situation bravely. The second aspect, the methodical, is his refuge to the historical Arabic stories and the way he uses them in order to view the contemporary weakness of Arabic situation. In other words, he functions the past event in order to serve his ideas that give them some significance whenever they are read. It is an aspect that is rarely to be found with his contemporaries. By such aspects, the poet is displaying a soul of creativity, when he couples between past and present in a sense that he could manage to compromise between thoughts and poetry which is the most essential point of time unity. Time, in Al-Baraddouni's point of view, is subject to the historical challenges and the feelings of human beings. It is divided into past, present, and future, where "the past is a period that is impossible to be retrieved, however, it remains better than the present," Albaraddouni stated. He further elaborated "the present is a bad situation that we have to get rid of, not to the past despite its beauty rather than to the future" (Alwan 34). Therefore, future is better than both, because one can shape it according to his/her will and can achieve prosperity and dignity.

3. Conclusion

Abdullah Al-Baraddouni is a contemporary Yemeni poet, whose poetry dedicated for the sake of the Yemeni and Arab identity. Therefore, the "self" is the center of his poetry in general and in "*Abu Tammam and Arabism of Today*" in particular. As a modern poet, Al-Baraddouni's literary commitment is clearly manifested throughout the form and content of his poetry. Unlike traditional Poets, whose poetry glorified the past mythical stories, and characters in the traditional poetry are super powerful, never to be found or imitated. However, the self is the main character of Al-Baraddouni's poetry; the character is the poet himself or his nations. Throughout the poem, Al-Baraddouni is politically and socially involved. He uses contrastive times, places and figures as creative aesthetic values as a way of distinction between the real society and the society he aspires to have. Thus, summoning the historical characters and events that Al-Baraddouni addresses through the poem conveying a moral message to the significance of the self as a crucial democratic constituent in any given society.

⁹Qahtan and Karib are two Yemeni kings who governed Yemen for long periods; they were symbols of heroism and resurrection. Karibil Wter was probably the most important ruler of the early days of Sabaian kingdom (5th century AD).

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