

The Poetics of T. S. Eliot and Salah Abdel-Sabour: A Thematic-Mythical Intertextuality

شاعرية النص عند ت. س. إليوت و صلاح عبد الصبور: التناسل الموضوعاتي الأسطوري

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Received: (4/7/2011), Accepted: (22/12/2011)

Abstract

The paper explores the similarities and parallels between the poetics of both T.S. Eliot and Salah Abdel-Sabour on the thematic use of mythical allusions and objective correlatives. Both poets show common human thematic interests and concerns of modern life, its predicaments and aspirations, mainly through evoking a web of such mythical allusions or mythopoetics. Based on Eliot's mythical method (mythopoetics) and his notion of objective correlatives, Abdel-Sabour reflects on the concept of intertextuality. The paper also traces the engagement of both poets in a process of transcultural poetic dialogues. It argues that modern Arab poets, like Abdel-Sabour, attempt to construct bridges with Western poetics, namely Eliot's. Influenced by Eliot, Abdel-Sabour integrates the traditional and modernized mythical allusions to express the human concerns of modern man, basically, after experiencing various crises, conflicts and dilemmas, like 1984 and 1967 wars. Modern Arabic poetry, similar to Eliot's, has become a more relevant and reliable medium of expression to explore modern man in the worldwide.

Keywords: mythopoetics (mythical allusions), intertextuality, objective correlatives, culture.

ملخص

يهتم هذا البحث باستكشاف أوجه التشابه في شاعرية كل من الشاعر الإنجليزي ت. س. إليوت والشاعر العربي المصري صلاح عبد الصبور، والمتعلقة بتوظيف الأساطير أو تلميحاتها الأسطورية والمعادلات الموضوعية توظيفاً ذا مغزى. يعرض كلُّ من الشعارين التقاطعات والاهتمامات الإنسانية الموضوعية في الحياة المعاصرة، في مآزقها وتطلعاتها من خلال استحضار مجموعة من الإشارات الأسطورية. ويجسد عبد الصبور مفهوم التناسخ، وذلك اعتماداً على أسلوبية إليوت في توظيف الأسطورة شعراً و فكرة المعادل الموضوعي. كما يتتبع البحث اهتمام الشعارين في حوارات شاعرية ثقافية/حضارية، ويبرهن محاولة الشعراء العرب الحدائين، أمثال عبد الصبور، بناء جسور مع الشاعرية الغربية، وتحديداً، شاعرية إليوت. وتأثراً بالشاعر إليوت، فإن عبد الصبور يدمج بين التراث الشعري التقليدي والآخر الحدائين للتعبير عن الاهتمامات الإنسانية للإنسان المعاصر، خصوصاً، بعد أن شهد صراعات وأزمات ومآزق متنوعة مثل حربي ١٩٤٨م و١٩٦٧م. لقد أصبح الشعر العربي الحديث، وعلى غرار شاعرية إليوت، وسيلة أكثر ملاءمة وموثوقية لاستكناه الإنسان الحديث في جميع أنحاء العالم.

كلمات مفتاحية: شعرية الأسطورة (الإشارات الأسطورية)، التناسخ، المعادل الموضوعي، الثقافة/الحضارة.

Modern Arabic poetry emerged only after the Arab war of 1948, followed by defeats and setbacks, particularly that of 1967. This poetry has been influenced by this new tide of national poetry and the collapse of the Arab blunt reality that generated skepticism among the Arab intellectuals and artists and dropped all the traditional Arab reliabilities, the sacred constants, and taboos. Modern Arab poets, like Salah Abdel-Sabour, seek new trends and methods to reflect on such emergents and aftermaths; it happened after being in contact with the foreign cultures, namely Western, so that they could innovate the methods of composition and expression. So, they gained much knowledge in history, mythology, psychology, sociology and their poetic and epistemological sources from various tributaries of the East and the West, mainly Sufism. They have also benefited from the theories of existentialism, socialism and the interactions with Western poetry, mainly that of T. S. Eliot's. They had great openness to popular cultures which include the tales of *Thousand and One Nights* and Al-Hallaj (Badawi, 1975:117). Poetry unites people of the same human concerns and cultural rituals and rites, as a result,

modern Arab poetry is viewed as "a powerful factor in the re-integration of a scattered and divided culture" (Arberry, 1975:vii).

David Moody (1980: 31) argues that Eliot created and mastered an exemplary world poetic language, a language that distinguishes him, allowing his "ideal feelings" to release, and puts him in the forefront of other modern poets. Thus, Eliot's poetic language allows him to be the pioneering poet that impresses modern Arab poets, like Abdel-Sabour, who read, quoted and followed his aesthetic and influential poetical methods. Accordingly, modern poetry seems to be a more relevant and reliable means to discover modern man and his world, where poets bear various visions of man, life, universe, existence, values and knowledge. In other words, modern poetry became the crucible to explain the world, its transformations, and shifts. Modernist Arab poets were fascinated with Eliot's view of tradition, his conservative religious thinking, his resourceful poetic techniques and his use of myth ... to articulate native issues integral to the Arab world in an era of great transformations. (Gouhar, 2009:51). Jabra I. Jabra defines myth in relation to the modern Arab poetry and writes:

Myth is a set of beliefs, stories, fables, metaphysics, folktales, horror, love, vegetation, fertility, drought, death and eternity which accumulated in human soul in consciousness or unconsciousness to provide [this soul] with vividness and energy in its struggle against nature or destructive powers in order to have a sort of survival that deserves human's care and love. (qtd. in Saleh, 1995:47, my translation)⁽¹⁾.

Moreover, George El-Hage says that Eliot's cry to abandon "the false simplicity, sentimentality, and emotionalism of Romantic poetry" and to devise a more convincing style "capable of capturing real life experience in all its complexity and harshness" inspires modern Arab poets (2007, retrieved on 14/3/2011 from <http://georgeel-hage.com/George>).

Topics that are frequently encountered in modern Arabic poetry include the experience of loss, psychological disruption, internal turmoil

(1) All quotations from the Arabic references are my translation.

and conflicts, existential worries, spatial and self-alienation, influenced by T. S. Eliot's poems, namely "*The Waste Land*" (1930), which has paved the way for modern Arab poets to reflect on the themes of boredom, apathy, indifference, depression and anxiety, a thing that makes the Arab poets in general "engaged in transcultural dialogues with Western masters particularly T.S Eliot" (Gouhar, 2009:44). They have written sad lyrics that translate their symphony of loss and wandering, alienation and psychological breakdown and self-existential melting because of the deteriorating of overall human values and the degradation of the Arab community attributed to the false values and the repeated defeats. Arthur J. Arberry also points out that Arabic literature, in general, and Arabic poetry, in particular, are evidently "influenced by foreign elements" and that even if poetry is "naturally more conservative than prose, ... the domination of external conceptions and values" is remarkable (1975:vi).

Moreover, modern Arab poets have benefited from a set of myths and symbolic allusions of rebirth, renewal and awakening, inspired by Babylonian, Greek, Phoenician and Arab paganism, Christian beliefs, Arab-Islamic heritage and human thought in general. These mythical allusions include Prometheus, Sisyphus, Tiresias, Al-Hallaj, among others (Badawi, 1975:156). These mythical allusions signify a variety of themes like rebirth, resurrection, renewal, fertility rituals, and death-in-life and life-in-death. Such a set of mythical allusions reflects the conflict between the good and the evil and the heroic and the defeated. In this regard, the academic and popular success of post WWII Arabic poetry has evoked Western myths and fused them with the "cultural traditions of the ex-colonizer," providing evidence of authentic tendencies to open dialogues with the West (Gouhar, 2009:49). Fakhri Saleh tries to raise the question of authenticity and the affirmation of the cultural identity in the presence of western influences on the modern Arabic literature, especially poetry. He also argues that most of the comparative studies held by various comparatists have shown diversified similarities and parallels between modern western poetic discourses and that of the Arab poets (Saleh, 1995:11).

Furthermore, the excessive appropriation of Western traditions involving mythic allusions of fertility, resurrection and ritualistic sacrifices is an indication of modern Arab poets' tendency to incorporate Western culture. They do so in order to articulate indigenous purposes and local narratives, according to Gouhar (Gouhar, 2009:53). In this regard, Salma Kh. Jayyusi points out that modernist Arab poets "delineated [their] visions of suffering and final triumph, of barrenness and fecundity, of death and rebirth," benefiting from Eliot's mythopoetics, mythical methods and his notion of objective correlative (Jayyusi, 1987:21). Myth in Arabic poetry is employed to create fresh poetic structures that synthesize "a powerful contemporary message of rebirth" to readers of various classes (Allen, 2000:130). Genesis Jones (1964:320) emphasizes the importance of using the mythical method and its function in offering modern poetry its main features:

Eliot has done something which will influence poetry for a long time. The mythical method has given a new and adequate organon to the contemporary poet [...] it brings back into poetry the religious and historical modes of thought which had been so long out of fashion.

Clearly, modern Arab poets' awareness is linked to the human collective awareness, based on the awareness of the challenges that threaten human present, future, existence and security altogether. Such awareness unifies modern Arab poets' attitudes dictated by the desire in decent life, renewal and triumph over all challenges. Modern Arab poets' mythical codes of death and life; death of the self and time, and life of hope, love, freedom, stability and dignity are evident in modern poetry. The conflict between life and death, physically and spiritually, mainly for Arab poets, is the conflict between "to be" or "not to be". This mythical duality of death and life through the experience of sufferings means to purify the self of its sins and follies (Shaheen, 1996:56). Accordingly, modern Arab poets create new mechanisms of revolution against hatred, enslavement and exile in place and history. Also, they link the use of myth to their own cultures and social realities, bearing in mind the cultural, ethical, moral, spiritual and human features of both different cultures: Western and Arab. Modern Arab poets seek "fresh sources of

inspiration" to express their people's reactions against tough and painful political and social realities (Allen, 2000:130). To Eliot and Abdel-Sabour, the modern world is a wasteland, devastated by moral and spiritual wounds that have affected its reproductive organs and creative functions.

A lot of modern Arab poets read Eliot's mythopoetics and mythical allusions in their various themes and motifs. Samuel Moreh states that Abdel-Sabour has benefited from T. S. Eliot's mythopoetics and aesthetic theory that reject the traditional techniques and conventional poetic diction, favoring "a simple style incorporating images from daily life" and cultural memories of different origins. (1988:174). However, El-Hage attacks the modern materialistic world which is "void of all spirituality, spurned a sense of urgency," mainly on the part of modern Arab poets to evoke various Biblical, Koranic, historical and mythical allusions to "supplant the harsh reality of their world with a new unifying nationalistic identity" (2007, retrieved on 14/3/2011 from <http://georgeelhage.com/George>). Also, modern Arab poets keep carrying the sense of internal exile out of the original feeling of "intellectual bankruptcy, literary sterility and political ineffectiveness," expressing their cry in "the wilderness, prophesying the coming of the redeemer" (Ibid). In this respect, Abdel-Sabour is considered one of the poets who can reflect the depth of the position occupied by T. S. Eliot in world modern poetry for his poetic and visionary greatness. Commenting on Eliot's aesthetic poetics, Moody states that Eliot's universal themes make him a crucible that modern world poets drain from for he struggles to "unify a vastly more inclusive and complex sensibility" that appeals to modern poets (1980:79). Moody adds that Eliot follows "the very modes of Dante's sensibility, from the simple, direct and even austere manner of speech to the phantasmagoric and the visionary" (Ibid:125). In this sense, benefiting from this mythical story, modern poets keep burning and sacrificing in order to enlighten the scattered dark places and to encourage other people to do the same for the purpose of human dignity and survival.

In the context of talking about the initial readings, which paved the way for his technical consciousness, Abdel-Sabour says that the shadows of all these readings fade from the aesthetic memory, except those of "Eliot the Great" (Abdel-Sabour, *Tell*, 1992:397, my translation)⁽¹⁾. Abdel-Sabour employs Eliot's notions of mythical method and objective correlative. Inspired by Eliot's mythical method and archetypal images, modern Arab poets, like Abdel-Sabour, struggle to liberate Arabic culture and literature from fossilized traditions and stagnant heritage (Gouhar, 2009:51). Jones writes about the perspective of mythopoetics in Eliot's poetics:

The casual reader who encounters at the beginning of "*The Waste Land*" the god Hyacinth and the Hanged Man, the Cumaean Sibyl and Madam Sosostriis, and who learns from the notorious notes how deep has been the influence of anthropology on the poetry of Mr. Eliot; such a reader may be pardoned for thinking that Mr. Eliot's allusions to myth are a concitation of any number of backward devils. But that would be to miss the point of his use of myth in fulfilling his poetic purpose. (1964:289).

To Abdel-Sabour, Eliot portrays the present with its spiritual poverty and works as a catalyst for the present people to look beyond their "spiritual and intellectual poverty" (*Tell*, 1992:398). The "secret of that greatness of Eliot lies between the negative spiritual nature of the contemporary world and the positive spiritual nature of the ancient world" (Ibid:399). Eliot was haunted by the idea of time, and he fuses the past with the present in the form of mythical symbols, revealing a state of meditation on the social and religious values and morals. Eliot argues in his essay "Tradition and the Individual Talent" (1921) that "the difference between the present and the past is that the conscious present is an awareness of the past in a way and to an extent which the past's awareness of itself cannot show (1972:14). In this sense, social problems in the Arab world are perceived as "being humanistic and universal in scope and national and eternal in character," according to Abdel-Sabour

(1) All statements and poetry quotations from Abdel-Sabour's texts are my translation.

(*Tell*, 1992:341). Also, modern Arab poets receive Eliot's criticism of the "city, pointing to its spiritual emptiness, cruelty and loneliness, directly and simply describing the ugly reality of life" (Moreh,1988:143). Jayyusi says that confronted with Western literature, culture and artistic genres, modern Arab poets "displayed a completely new sensibility and a new kind of creativity." She adds that modern Arab poets read Western poetry in the original and in translation, "absorbing" the creative poetic ideas in a way of experimentation (1987:6). Moreover, Arberry (1975:vii) views that modern Arabic poetry manifests "a new synthesis of thought and style," in which "the foreign influences have been wholly absorbed." He adds that despite this sort of influence, modern Arab poets compose poems as Arabs, "not as half-Europeans." They are noticeably aware of their time, and they create "a new and authentic literature" (Ibid:viii).

Furthermore, Eliot elaborates on his mythopoetics in "Tradition and the Individual Talent" (1921), where he considers this mythopoetics a solution to the conflict between the old and the modern (1972:16). Similarly, Abdel-Sabour uses it in a wider way to re-read the Arabic tradition and the ancient Arabic poetry, "We urgently need to rethink our poetics ... and to look at this heritage according to our new measures ... then to maintain this heritage as we appropriate it to ourselves and our tastes" (*Tell*, 1992:122). Seemingly, there is a similitude in the psychological and temperamental sub-configuration of both poets. This similarity leads to a convergence in both poets' artistic visions. Again, instead of attempting to reading Eliot's works as a symbol of Western Christian hegemony and colonial discourse, Jayyusi states that,

Arab poets repeatedly drew the analogy between the aridity of Arab life after the 1948 disaster in Palestine and the aridity of the land in the fertility myth saved from complete waste only by death and the spelling of blood, analogies to the falling of rain over a parched land (1987:724).

The contemplative and mystical tendency and the tone of grief and melancholy imply aspects of metaphysical depression, a philosophical depth, a mastery of creativity and performance improvement as common denominators in the legacy of both Eliot and Abdel-Sabour's poetics. Poetically, the first thing that draws the attention of Abdel-Sabour to

Eliot is the stylistic and cognitive mythopoetic language that bears the flavor of mythical method and objective correlatives. Abdel-Sabour states "When I read T. S. Eliot at the beginning of my youth, I was inspired with his brave and effrontery language. We were keen poets to have our poetic language selected void of any semi-slang or colloquial words" (*My Life*, 1981:127). This makes Jayyusi assert that "poetry has many tongues but a single language", describing poetry as "the main vehicle for expressing the emotional experiences of people and for revealing their deeper consciousness of the world," when it enables the readers to get "intimate knowledge of other people's actual life situations" (1987:xxii-xxiii). Similarly, Moody points out that "the extensive web of literary allusions" created by Eliot constitutes a hypertext that modern poets imitate and that this web "cultivated his consciousness" (1980:59).

Abdel-Sabour cites an example of the poetically linguistic boldness that attracts his attention in Eliot's "*The Waste Land*," where there are common words such as "tea," "canned food," "socks," "slippers" and "washings," familiar to all readers of poetry. According to Moody, Eliot's poem expresses primarily the individual poet's anguish, amplified by those aspects of the poem that best characterize it, namely: the variety of voices, the references to different historic moments, and the abundance of literary allusions (Ibid:310). A thing that, not doubt, makes it the true crucible for modern poets to drain from. Nevertheless, Abdel-Sabour indicates that he has emerged from the mantle of Arabic school of romanticism to find himself "a prisoner of the Arab poetic tradition," which favors a special and distinct poetic diction that is a true reflection of daily life (1981:123). It seems that Eliot's linguistic and poetic boldness makes Abdel-Sabour and his contemporaries realize that poetry has no "fixed dictionary" Modern Arab poets' task is to express common human concerns and realities through employing a new web of mythical allusions and mythopoetics to overpass "the common and traditional poetic dictionary" (Ibid:127-128).

Employing mythical allusions, Eliot "transmutes his personal and private agonies into something rich and strange, something universal and

impersonal" (Moody, 1980:79). This is, I think, what makes Eliot well-known and resourceful to modern poets, mainly the Arab, for he objectifies his own experience by "magnifying it into a vision of the world" (Ibid:80). On the other hand, Mohammed M. Badawi (1993: 214) explains modern Arab poets' mythical allusions and masks so that they can "reconcile the mortal with the eternal, the finite with the infinite, the present with that which transcends the present," all of which operate within the framework of myths. In this sense, Abdel-Sabour tries to overpass the dictionary of Arabic poetry since his first collection "*People of my Country*," (1972) which includes poems such as "Sadness," "Hanging Zahran," and "Dominion for You" that show a significant departure from the common and traditional poetic language. These poems touch the heart of modern life in a plain and bold language. For example, in "Sadness," the poet says,

Morning shone but I never smiled,
and my face did not behold the morning
And out of the inner city, I came and asked for available livelihood
And dipped daily bread in water of conviction, and subsistence
And returned in the afternoon with penniless pocket
I drank tea on the way
And sowed my shoes
And played with dice between my palm and a friend (*Collection*, 1972:
36)

These lines embody a modern bold poetical language and seek to be free from the common traditional language. However, Abdel-Sabour says that he learnt from Eliot new techniques of revolutionary poetic language to portray everyday life of common people in "*People of my Country*" (*My Life*, 1981:82). In this respect, the Sudanese critic Mohammed Abdel-Hay believes that "the impact of Eliot has been mixed up in the mind of Abdel-Sabour in poems of '*The People of my Country*' with the impact of another poet: the Turkish poet Nazim Hikmet, who left a great influence on the whole modern Arabic poetry" (1980:14).

Thematically, Abdel-Sabour shows his sympathy with the underprivileged, those who constitute the poor and the oppressed. Moreh (1988:150) points out that Abdel-Sabour “felt a great gap between the greatly abstracted socialist ideology and the realities of poverty, accompanied by crime and degradation, common to both city and country.” Meanwhile, Abdel-Sabour maintains portraying the sorrows, anxieties, loneliness, sterility, misery and poverty of the Egyptian countryside’s people, as an example of the whole Arab world countryside’s people. In “Abi” (My Father), Abdel-Sabour projects on his own experience which dramatizes the collective tragedies of the Egyptian villagers, “A dog snapped at my brother / while he was tending the flock in the field/We wept/ When he called out / O Father” (*Collection*, 1972:55). Moreh states that this stanza expresses the poet's vision on a number of realistic themes, “the younger [...] were revolting against fate and divine decree, poverty, ignorance, and simple beliefs” (1988:148).

Abdel-Hay attributes Abdel-Sabour’s portrayal of modern real life and popular slang expressions mainly to Eliot's vision on life and human experiences. Abdel-Sabour’s interest in Eliot coincides with an interest in realist thinking (1980:21). Through using mythical allusions, Abdel-Sabour's poems such as “Hanging Zahran,” “Dominion for You,” and “*People of my Country*” imply realistic thoughts. Abdel-Sabour has been influenced by Eliot, mainly his bold and influential mythopoetic language, although this language does not completely depart from the use of slang words, proverbs and popular expressions. Yet, Eliot’s bold poetic language is not without its educated sophism, and he has always had a magic poetic touch, where he raises the ordinary daily language to the rank of symbolism (Abdel-Sabour, *My Life*, 1981:82). Meanwhile, Roger Allen justifies the innovative role of the modern Arab poets saying that political and social changes and shifts in the Arab world in the 20th century resulted in "new creative environment within which poets sense a need to speak with a more individual voice" (2000:74).

The use of realistic common words in “Dominion for You,” such as "winter nights," "torture," "death," "life," "storm," and "shadows" -

similar to those in Eliot's "The Hollow Men," (1925) such as "dead land," "petals," "death," "dream," "grass," "paralysed force," and "winds" – is closer to the mythopoetical language that dominates modern Arab poetry. Seemingly, Eliot's hallmarks in Abdel-Sabour's poems are evident in his subsequent collections, on the levels of poetic language, meanings, denotations and poetic visions. It also seems that the relationship of Abdel-Sabour with Eliot is not merely being influenced basically on surface simulation. Rather, it is based on cultural interaction caused by the convergence of poetic moods and true feelings. Substantially, Abdel-Sabour says in "Melody" – a poem in "The People of my Country," addressing his women neighbor,

My neighbor! I am not a prince
No, I'm not a comedian
In the palace of the prince (*Collection*, 1972:65)

Intertextually, it is similar to what Eliot says in "The Love Song of J. Alfred. Prufrock," "No I am not Prince Hamlet, Nor was meant to be" (Eliot, 1993:112). Also, Abdel-Sabour in "Sadness" describes the penetration of grief in his hometown and its people:

Grief extended in the city
As a thief in the middle of tranquility
As a serpent without hissing (*Collection*, 1972:37)

Moreover, Eliot quotes in "*The Waste Land*" French words from the introduction of Charles Baudelaire's "Flowers of Evil," (1857) such as "Hypocrite lecteur, mon semblable, mon frere" which mean "you, hypocrite reader, my twin, O my brother" (Eliot, 1993:388). In the same context, Abdel-Sabour follows Eliot and consequently quotes Baudelaire's words "Hypocrite Lecteur, Mon Semblable, mon frere" and says, addressing Baudelaire, in "Baudelaire," (1964) a poem in "The Old Knight's Dreams," "O Prisoner of my weary heart, And strange hopes, My own friend" (*Collection*, 1972:231). Baudelaire is a French poet with whom both Eliot and Abdel-Sabour were significantly haunted and from whom they quote. Beyond this inclusion and direct quotation, Abdel-Sabour seems to have been inspired by Eliot's poetic visions and images.

It is the inspiration that stems from the similarity of the human emotional experience and the convergence of mood, as noted above. These poetic images of grief imply the semantic shades and echoes of Eliot's metaphor of the evening in "The Love Song of J. Alfred. Prufrock" where he likens the evening as a patient lying on a surgeon's table:

Let us go then, you and I
When the evening is spread out
Against the sky
Like a patient etherized upon a table (1993:211)

Similarly, in "Reflections of the Night," Abdel-Sabour depicts the creep of the armies in darkness as a black fake stroller. He says "I always hear the heading carriage of time from behind," the carriage of time, i. e. the swift passage of time, here is the one which bears the life cycle of humans with its ups and downs, fortunes and misfortunes, successes and failures (*Collection*, 1972:275). This image of the carriage of time is evoked from Andrew Marvell's "To His Coy Mistress,"

But at my back I always hear
time's winged chariot hurrying near
And yonder, all before us lie
Deserts of vast eternity (2000:152)

However, it seems that Abdel-Sabour has taken the meaning mainly from Eliot not directly from Andrew Marvell. Yet, Eliot indicates that he quotes Marvell in the margins of "*The Waste Land*," creating a thematic intertextuality when he says in "The Fire Sermon,"

But at my back from time to time I hear
The sound of horns and motors, which shall bring
Sweeney to Mrs. Porter in the spring
But I hear from behind me from time to time
The roar of cars and horns
That will take Sweeney to Mrs. Porter in the spring (1993:99)

Similarly, in "Variations," Abdel-Sabour evokes Eliot's "Ash Wednesday," where he says:

Sometimes I cheer up, O my God
 Rid us of this dead time
 Punish us, never put away the cup of pain
 Teach us to tear up on our blind will
 In the daylight (Collection, 1972:277)

Meanwhile, Eliot says:

And pray to God to have mercy upon us
 May the judgement not be too heavy upon us
 Teach us to care and not to care
 Teach us to sit still (1993:66)

Here, there is a sort of thematic intertextuality in terms of repentance, remorse, divine forgiveness and mercy upon the people who commit sins against themselves and others. This intertextuality implies a human and universal phenomenon where sinners always ask for repentance and forgiveness, despite the different cultural beliefs, values and traditions. Also, these lines also remind us of the mythical figure of "Prometheus," who stole the sacred fire from Zeus and the gods to give to man in defiance of the gods. He tricked the gods into eating bare bones instead of good meat. In punishment, Zeus commanded that Prometheus be chained for eternity in the Caucasus. There, an eagle would eat his liver, and each day the liver would be renewed. So the punishment was endless, until Heracles finally killed the bird (Asimov, 1969:80). Benefiting from this mythical story, modern poets keep burning and sacrificing in order to enlighten the scattered dark places and to encourage other people to do the same for the purpose of human dignity and survival.

Moreover, in "Little Gidding" Eliot says,
 All manner of thing shall be well

When the tongues of flame are in folded,
Into the crowned knot of fire,
And the fire and the rose are one. (1993:73-74)

In these lines, Eliot evokes the mythical image of fire to refer to the mission of "Prometheus" in bringing the sacred fire from the sky to the earth for the purposes of purgation and salvation. Similarly, Abdel-Sabour says in "Hanging Zahran,"

Once, Zahran went over the back of the market
And saw the fire that burns field
And saw the fire, which kills children
Zahran was a friend for life
And saw flames sweeping life
Zahran extended his palm to the stars (1972:21)

Here, Zahran extends his palms to bring the sacred fire he promises himself for the people on earth to rid them of their sufferings, pains and for the same purpose of salvation. Abdel-Sabour employs his dramatic monologue whenever there is a need to mythicize a variety of historical and cultural figures and events that bear significant epistemological meanings. Badawi reminds us of modern Arab poets' profound identification with the mythical revolutionary figures of different myths or legends such as Prometheus, who signifies the possible emergence of an Arab poet as a savior who calls for revolutions against injustices and tyrannies in not only the Arab world, but also all over the universe (1993:39).

In addition, in "The Burial of the Dead" in *The Waste Land*, Eliot mocks the futility of wars and hopes that the body of his friend Jean Ferdinal - who died in World War I, is reborn in the same way that the god of fertility in ancient cultures dies and comes back alive each year to ensure the continuity of life,

That corpse you planted last year in your garden
Has it begun to sprout? Will it bloom this year?
Or has the sudden frost disturbed its bed? (1993:43)

Likewise, Abdel-Sabour evokes the same theme in "The Sad Thing,"

If you buried the body in the land
Its roots would foliate and fruits would ripen
In a heavy foot (*Tell*, 1992:109)

Abdel-Sabour employs various myths and mythical allusions of different origins and cultures in his poetry. He does so in a way that differs from the rest of his contemporaries of modern Arab poets. He does not stick himself to mere mythical names in affectation, but he draws the content or significance of such myths and mythical allusions and employs them to express his own poetic and epistemological experience and vision on the themes of Arab – yet universal phenomena of riot, injustice, tyranny and oppression, as what happens in mythical allusions to Prometheus in Eliot and Abdel-Sabour's poetry. In this respect, Abdel-Sabour justifies his mythical method in poetry, "we have accepted myth when it is a technically integrated factor in the entity of the poem that bears its implications and uncovers its images and meanings to readers. And we have repeatedly repudiated it when it is attached to the poem in mannerism (*My Life*, 1981:137). He has justified his own mythopoetical way saying that he has tried to use myths to find out proper theme/s and to reflect on his own experience in order to give them a substantive objective aspect (*Ibid*:141).

Jayyusi believes that the use of mythical allusions and archetypal images has become rife in modern Arabic poetry as a result of poetic contact with European counterparts and contemporaries to set up a "role of myth in the human consciousness." She adds that these poetic innovations and experimentations enable the modern Arab poets to "touch the core of Arab history" and to "unify the present predicaments of Arab life" (Jayyusi, 1987:25). Also, Badawi objectively comments on modern Arab poets' experimentation in both theme and structure, "apart from its ancient ancestry in pre-Islamic poetry, Arabic poetry has an ultimately religious and anthropological significance reinforced by the influence of Eliot's *"The Waste Land"* (Badawi, 1993:83). Thus, Abdel-Sabour believes that the motivation to use myths and mythical allusions in poetry is not just knowledge but the attempt to give the poem more

depth and significance and to transfer the experience from its personal subjective level to a fundamental human one, or rather to dig his poems in history (*My Life*, 1981:132). Accordingly, Abdel-Sabour expresses his own understanding of tradition in terms of the "theory of tradition" as mentioned in Eliot's "Tradition and the Individual Talent," which simplifies Eliot's mythical method and mythopoetics (Ibid). In this regard, Eliot's mythical method has motivated Abdel-Sabour to refer to his own Arab and Islamic traditions in order to express his poetic and intellectual experience. Modern Arabic poetry has been "reckoned by the Arabs as their supreme art," and it has "an intellectual and emotional appeal beyond what is normal in Europe" (Arberry, 1975:vii).

Abdel-Sabour says that Eliot's use of the myth of Tiresias, a mythological prophetic figure, who was turned into a hermaphrodite and is indicated by the phrases "throbbing between two / lives" and "Old man with wrinkled female breasts" in "*The Waste Land*," guides him to the discovery of the dramatic monologue, where the poet uses a mask to express his own feelings and thoughts. Eliot has made the character of the blind Tiresias, who mythically undergoes the experience of female-male transformation, a witness and commentator on the events in the poem and tells a brave opinion amid chaos and contradiction (Asimov, 1969:127). One of the most significant myths "*The Waste Land*" is Tiresias, presented along with other scattered mythopoetics in the poem. In this respect, Shaheen states that it is through Tiresias that Eliot could ultimately present his poetic ability, exploiting to a large extent, the tradition. In addition, benefiting from myth and Tiresias, Eliot shows that there could be "new tradition," born on the hand of Tiresias, indicating that the good poet does not stop submissively at tradition (1996:65). Eliot identifies mythically with Tiresias who suffers like any other ordinary person, though he is blind but his psyche speaks aloud and can see what is going on in reality. In evoking the mythical image of Tiresias, Eliot presents it as "an object for [human] contemplation," asserts Moody, and as "the substance of the poem" to objectify and signify the theme of death (1980:88) and with this mythical method, Eliot wants "a rite de passage that would work" (Ibid:111).

Moreover, Abdel-Sabour says in "Memoranda of King Ajeeb Bin Khaseeb" – "Memoranda of the Wondrous Son of the Fertile" – that he evokes mythicized folkloric persona in order to talk about some of his own concerns and intellectual interests. In the legend, King Ajeeb Bin Khaseeb is one of the kings in a story in "Thousand and One Nights." He loses his property on getting bored and decides to leave empty-handed and powerless. Abdel-Sabour tries to employ this story to talk about modern man's misery and grimness. (*My Life*, 1981:141). It is then Abdul-Sabour's own mythopoetic method that makes his poetry "reside in the many hidden signals, the attitudes, and the unmasking of contemporary human predicaments" (Jayyusi, 1987:31). For example, in "Bishr El-Hafi," he conjures up the persona of Bishr El-Hafi as a mythicized mystic figure from Arab history and culture. Justifying this technique of evoking historical and traditional figures and events, Abdel-Sabour says that he favors such a mythical method to fuse such historical and traditional figures under the surface of the poem so that the elite readers can virtually digest them. He recommends a second reading of a poem that evokes such mythical allusions, which enable the readers to invade their shadows of meaning and significance (*My Life*, 1981:143). In this regard, Allen points out that Eliot's "*The Waste Land*," through its mythical allusions and objective correlatives, has provided modern Arab poets "an emblematic text" (Allen, 2000:127).

Abdel-Sabour has described his poetic method in evoking traditional figures as masks similar to Eliot's way in using objective correlatives. These correlatives are originally used to conceal subjective emotions and personal feelings through the creation of external objective images that stand for these feelings and emotions and express them indirectly. In fact, Abdel-Sabour succeeds in employing his poetic method in a distinct way through evoking traditional and cultural stories and biographies. For instance, in "The Departure" – a poem in "The Dreams of an Old Knight" - Abdel-Sabour employs the idea of the migration of the Prophet Mohammed from Mecca to Medina as an objective correlative or a persona to reveal his personal desire, as a modern man, to get out of the bitter reality to a brighter and stabler reality. He says that he has evoked

this event to offer the readers two levels of significance: the direct level of the personal experience and another one after having been transformed into an objective experience, in general, mainly man's longing for freedom, liberty and life in the city of light (*My Life*, 1981:144). Jayyusi seems to agree with Abdul-Sabour stating that modern Arabic poetry is "a poetry of longing, a longing that permeates the poetic impulse" and a poetry that searches for the "lost love of Arab intellectuals everywhere" and for "the Arab creative genius" (1987:36).

Accordingly, "The Departure" is the best exemplifying poem of intertextuality in modern Arabic poetry, where it exceeds even the concept of intertextuality as applied by Eliot in his poems. Intertextuality here is not merely a quotation or inclusion of other texts, but it goes beyond this to evoke a certain situation or a memorial incident that dominates each poem. Thus, it is not a process of repeating or copying another text or experience. Rather, it is a technique that re-employs and revives such events or incidents in the memory of humanity in a creative and artistic way. Abdel-Sabour says in "The Departure,"

Get out of my city, of my old hometown
with my painful burdens ...
Under the dress I carried my secret,
I buried it at the door under the sky and the stars
[...]
The torment of my trip is my chastity
And death in the desert is my eternal resurrection
If I die I live in the illuminating city, as I want
The city of the visions that sips light
The city of the visions that surges in light. (*Collection*, 1972:235)

This mythicized event inspires Abdel-Sabour in his migration within the self or as an attempt to escape from his trapped self in the prison of the mud-made body and materialism restricted to the old self divinely originated in his own human world. Accordingly, the poet's city is his dense self, coveted to be abandoned to the city of illumination, "where the sun does not leave the afternoon" (*Collection*, 1972:237). It is a euphemized reference to the absolute liberty from delusions.

Likewise, Eliot presents a similar mythicized journey of "Magi," but in a different way. It is the journey of man in death-in-life for awareness and rebirth, where man tries to explore a number of places, whether imagined or real, in order to gain more knowledge and experience. It is also the journey of the spiritual quest indicated by the biblical imagery regarding the story of Christ; his death and resurrection. Eliot says "three trees on the low sky," "Six hands at an open door dicing for pieces of silver" and "We returned to our places, these Kingdoms,/But no longer at ease here, in the old dispensation,/With an alien people clutching their gods/I should be glad of another death" (1993:203). In this respect, El-Hage states that modern Arab poets consider themselves the intellectual liable representatives of their people in the process of transformation and rebirth, they long for liberty and emotional and physical stability (2007, retrieved on 14/3/2011 from <http://georgeel-hage.com/George>). They have the role of engaging and influencing the historical events of the current era. It seems that modern Arab poets got impacted with global events where "at the end of 1990s we see a region deeply divided ... between the Arab and the Islamic, the traditional heritage and modern developments ... continue to be disturbed by factors beyond the control of the majority of the region's inhabitants," according to Allen (2000:33).

However, achieving the dream of reaching the city of illumination and winning the full life can only be realized through the experience of death, where "if I died as I wish I would live in the city of enlightenment." So, it is Eliot's spiritual death where his eternal rebirth lies. It is the same idea of rebirth that modern Arab poets evoke and intertextualize with Eliot's employment of the mythical gods of fertility and rebirth in "*The Waste Land*." Abdel-Sabour does so aesthetically within the crucible of myths of life, death, rebirth / resurrection, love and revolution. Explaining the function of these mythopoetic masks, Badawi states that each mask constitutes a "name through which the poet speaks about, divested of his own subjectivity," and it is the device by which the poet "transcends the limitations of Lyricism [...] free from distortion, emotionalism, and psychological ailments with which subjective romantic poetry abounds" (1993:214). Both Eliot and Abdel-Sabour pay

special attention to human concerns that touch their poetic core, raising their themes to a mythical universal level.

Such mythical allusions include Adonis or Tammuz of the Assyrians, Babylonians, Phoenicians and the god Osiris in ancient Egypt. In this respect, the god of fertility is reborn after his death every year to renew the cycle of life on earth. In such a way, the poem moves from dead nature and creates life and fertility, moving to the time of tribe to celebrate its role in the creation of life and its preservation (Moreh, 1988:141). Modern Arab poets have employed such mythical themes and motifs to mobilize the Arab nation from the long slumber. Engaging Western thought on the epistemological and cultural paradigms, modernist Arab poets, in the post WWII era, develop a revolutionary poetics which fulfills "the horizons of expectations" of a reading community dreaming of change and reform (Gouhar, 2009:49).

Furthermore, Abdel-Sabour's theoretical or dramatic poetics shows another instance of intertextuality with Eliot. Modern critics have compared the former's play "*The Tragedy of Al-Hallaj*" (1972) with Eliot's play "*Murder in the Cathedral*" (1935) for their intertextual mythical motifs and evidence that show Abdel-Sabour's commitment to a universal sense of human concerns. For example, Abdul-Rahman Zeidan (2001) views Eliot's presence in "*The Tragedy of Al-Hallaj*" as treating the question of the conflict between the political institution and the religious one. In "*The Tragedy of Al-Hallaj*," Zeidan adds, Abdel-Sabour manifests the culture of poetic drama using a multi-layered language with apocalyptic vision in its mythical or mythicized symbols and allusions. It is the poetic dramatic language that bears the motifs of rejection, rebellion, detachment and transgression (Culture Dialogue, retrieved on 11/11/2010 from http://www.benzidaneabderrahmane.ma/saah_abdessabour.htm).

Thematic diversity characterizes modern Arab poetry which has been thoroughly "excellent in [its] own right," and it represents a variety of "artistic, social, and political currents" that affect Arabs (Arberry, 1975:v). Accordingly, Arab poets express their sense of disillusionment and despair using symbols and allusions assimilated from Western

culture ... they find some points of similarity between their political predicament and the spiritual crisis of their Western forebears particularly Eliot, who experiences the tragic consequences of WWI (Gouhar, 2009:52). For example, in "*The Tragedy of Al-Hallaj*," Abdul-Sabour makes Al-Hallaj and Ibn Suleiman speak up and admit his vision,

Hallaj: It is the corrupt Sultan who abuses the people; he enslaves and makes them hungry

Ibn Suleiman: You mean you're inciting disobedience against the rulers?

Hallaj: but I urge them to obey the Lord of rulers.

God granted them order and discipline.

Why was it troubled, with disturbed provisions?

He created man in His own image in the best form,
then, why was man sent back to the rank of cattle?

(*Collection*, 1972:582)

The play is an attack against those leaders and governors who enslave their people and make them suffer a lot and for ever. Similarly, Eliot has his characters utter the same words in,

Becket: Shall I who ruled among the doves as an eagle,

Now take the shape of wolf among wolves?

[...]

Third Priest: For good or ill, let the wheel turn.

The wheel has been still, these seven years, and no good.

For ill or good, let the wheel turn.

For who knows the end of good or evil?

And in,

Becket: The last temptation is the greatest treason:

To do the right deed for the wrong reason.

Death has a hundred hands and walks by a thousand ways. (1967:46)

However, Abdel-Sabour says that he is not annoyed or upset for this sort of comparison, which amounts to a charge of plagiarism and

simulation (Tell, 1992:400). He justifies this intertextuality attributing it to Eliot's notion of "Tradition and the Individual Talent," in which Eliot asserts that every nation or race in the worldwide "has not only its own creative, but its own critical turn of mind" (Eliot, 1972:15). Abdel-Sabour also adds "A man, like me, having read Eliot's theory of poetic tradition must have been criticized by such oversensitive and unfair critics. Tradition is not but episodes of extended benefits that learners get and learn from teachers" (Tell 1992:400). Based on Eliot's influential mythopoetics, Shaheen says that Eliot challenges the myth, not to ridicule it but to illustrate that the "individual talent" enables the poet to construct a myth out of language not from an inherited content. Also, this "individual talent" expresses a wider vision and signification in short and few lines and signifies that myth for a talented poet is originally language, where the mythological content of tradition is changeable and renewable through language (1996:68).

Abdel-Sabour says that when he wrote "*The Tragedy of Al-Hallaj*," he imagined a personal issue raised by the play, addressing his theme of personal salvation. It is the role of the artist in society. He adds that he was suffering a devastating confusion about the many phenomena of the current era which invoke a lot of questions in his mind. He also raises the question that Al-Hallaj himself asks "What should I do?," which Al-Hallaj answers: "to speak .. to die." In this sense, Al-Hallaj's torment was part of the torment of intellectuals in most modern societies, part of "the battle between the sword and the word." Accordingly, "*The Tragedy of Al-Hallaj*" reflects "the great faith that I kept pure and flawless, that is the strong belief in the word" (My Life, 1981:195). In addition, Abdel-Sabour reminds readers and critics that Eliot's "*Murder in the Cathedral*" is not the first play of its kind in the field of theater about "martyrdom and holiness," as he put it. Meanwhile, Allen points out that the deliberate and prompt themes that dominate modern Arabic poetry include the "concerns and aspirations of an educated and mostly middle-class readership" that confront the "injustices and complexities of life in the newly independent societies of the Middle East" (2000:69). In exposing and publicizing such themes, modern Arab poets reside to

mythopoetics that epistemologically express their national and human concerns and realities.

These two plays, "*The Tragedy of Al-Hallaj*" and "*Murder in the Cathedral*," deal with the conflict between religious authority and secular powers. The mythicized Al-Hallaj was accused of calling for general revolt against the Sultan to protest against the corruption and injustice; he was also charged of heterodoxy during the trial so that his execution is acceptable to the public. Similarly, the mythicized St. Thomas a Beckett, the Archbishop of Canterbury in Eliot's "*Murder in the Cathedral*," was murdered for refusing to work as a consultant of the entourage of King Henry II. Allen points out that "the political corruption and social injustices" symbolize the moral destruction of the Arab countries, similar to events that lead to the murder of Archbishop in Eliot's play. He also adds that this fact stimulates modern Arab poets to create poetry that focuses on "oppression, poverty, injustice, and exploitation" and supports "revolutionary change" (2000:127).

It is then a manifestation of the great conflict between human and divine powers. Eliot's vision of mythopoetics and objective correlative inspires Arab poets and enrich their literary doctrine and ignite cultural debates and dialogues, a thing that has become true as a result of reading Eliot and his theories of both creative poetry and criticism. Seemingly, getting inspired by other national and non-national poets is not a mere disadvantage or a sin that diachronically distorts the creative writings of coming generations of poets all over the world. Rather, it is an advantage as long as it adds more technical, aesthetic and thematic aspects without exaggeration or affectation. This is what characterizes Abdel-Sabour's poetic experience, in which he reacts to all new emerging modern artistic and thematic techniques and sensitivities.

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