"Sea in the Desert, Desert in the Sea": An Exploration of an Inflected Spatial Image in English / Arabic Verse

Prof. Osama Madany

Menoufia University, Faculty of Arts
Professor of English Literature
osamamadany@yahoo.com

Abstract

The turn of the twentieth century in Egypt witnessed an introspective romantic veneer, replacing the vociferous "public voice" of the Arab poet in ancient Arabia. Reading through the rich body of Arabic verse, one is struck by the ubiquity of wasteland image clusters of which barren land (desert) and water (sea or river) come at the forefront and assume overlapping features. It is this combination of the modernist and the romantic that gives modern Arabic poetry its distinct flavor.

Samples are explored of contemporary Egyptian poets, focusing primarily on the often-overlapping desert/sea imagery. This image is assimilative, on the one hand of the dual geographical locations, existing mostly side by side, that influence the daily perception of the common Arab dweller - the sea and desert existing in such expansive proximity as seldom occurs in other parts of the world. On the other hand, the image is resonant, with obvious inflected nuances, of Romantic English poetry: the image often overlaps; the desert often assuming the features of the sea in Arabic verse and vice versa in its English counterpart. Drawing on classical Arab poets, and on English Romantic pioneers, this paper investigates this inflected legacy on contemporary Egyptian poetry. **[Bul. Soc. Géog. d'Égypte, Special issue 2022, PP. 23- 36].**

Key Words: Sea; Desert; Arabic; Romantic.

"Modern Arabic Poetry," a label often attached to the type of Poetry written in Arabic from the middle of the twentieth century to the present, involves a rejection of the revered fundamentals of Arabic poetics, usually called "Amud al-Shir" (literally 'the pillar of poetry'), such as the unity of the poem (wahadat al – qasidah) "manifested in the required use of monometer and monorhyme in a poem composed of two hemsticched lines" (Simawe, 2001: 8). Mostly influenced by the west, especially the readings and translations of English and French verse, such technical shifts in the form of the modern Arabic poem were accompanied by the adoption of new concepts that almost, if not totally, severed the ties with the tradition of Arabic poetry:

> *Today's verse is unquestionably new: it differs drastically from that produced no more than two generations ago by the pre-*

> *revivalists – those late nineteenth-century obscure poets who maintained, in doggerel, the traditions of the Mameluki and Turkish periods – or even by the revivalists, that is, those who tried, often with success, to revive the tradition of ancient Arabic poetry, led by Al-Barudi, Shawqi, Hafiz Ibrahim and Mutran. (Enani, 1994 "Hijazi - Abdul-Saboor Thrust": 173)*

By the turn of the century, a more introspective, romantic veneer, literally accommodating the Arabic origin of the genre(1), had replaced the vociferous "Public voice" of predecessors assuming the place of the Arab poet in ancient Arabia. The romantic revolt of Al-Aqqad whose concepts could directly be traced to Wordsworth and Coleridge, as Enani notes, led to the fact that he "attacked poetic diction, personification, the oratorical tone of the preceding generation, and insisted on the use of incidents from 'common life' in embodying the 'primal emotions of man'" (Enani, "Hijazi – Abdul-Saboor Thrust": 173-74). The "dissenting" Diwan school of Al-Aqqad and his partners, Shukri and Al- Mazni, set the scene for the romantic movement of the Apollo Groupin the 1930s. But the experimentation and consequent revolution in form by modern poets resulted in the gradual demise of the Apollo spirit:

> *The Arabic poem ceased to be an open- ended collection of lines of equal length, sharing the same rhyme, with various themes and became the record of an emotional experience in the modern sense, in lines of varying length, with a 'free' rhyme scheme, and a metre relying on the repetition of the same foot rather than on the traditional metrical structure where each line consisted of a fixed number of different (but occasionally similar) feet, arranged according to an unalterable prescribed pattern. (Enani, "Hijazi – Abdul-Saboor Thrust": 174-75)*

Modern ideas like "organic unity" and "development" coupled with technical innovations like T.S. Eliot's accent on "stress rhythm", vers libre, and other new verse forms were now in vogue. Eliot, especially, was instrumental, both technically and thematically, to the revolution in modern Arabic poetry. In a lecture on "Modern Arabic literature and the West," given at several British

(1) The Arabic word for poet (sha'ir) simply means a "man of feeling".

universities in 1968; Palestinian poet, Jabra Ibrahim Jabra explained the new trend in Arabic poetry of the 1950s: "Most important of all was The Waste Land," he bluntly remarked (77). With the poem's recreation of a civilization in ruins after World War I, disillusionment, loss of traditional values as a source of meaning and the economic collapse of the Great Depression, Jabra's assertion might certainly apply to twentieth century poetry worldwide. But Eliot's poem was of resonant significance to the Arab poetic mentality:

> *For Arab poets, the devastating experience which drew them to the poem was what they uniformly refer to as the Palestinian disaster or debacle. The formation of Israel in 1948 displaced masses of Palestinians; the failure of other Arab states to restore Palestine and relieve the refugees' suffering generated cynicism among Arab intellectuals about the good will not only of the West but also of their own often tyrannical governments. (Rothenthal, 1997: 17)*

The Waste Land, in this respect, seemed to be written out of their precise situation. Parched land longing for rain was naturally an age-old literary image in this desert region, which was moreover the original home of the Babylonian Tammuz myth.(1) Jabra himself did an Arabic translation of Frazer's The Golden Bough Adonis section; other writers translated Eliot's poems and essays, and the wasteland motif gripped the Modern Arabic poetic imagination.

Indeed, reading through the rich body of Arabic verse from the 1950s onwards, one cannot help being struck by the ubiquity of wasteland image clusters of which barren land (desert) and water (sea or river) come at the forefront. Other images group and regroup sequentially: sterility/ rock; blood / sacrifice / Tammuz/ the Cross; new sprouts of rain / bread / resurrection / the phoenix. The intense energy of the poetry was reinforced by the new-found prosodic freedom; a determination to break with strict classical Arabic verse forms to find metres commensurate with anguished commitment to the issues of

(1) In Eliot's method of breaking the literature of the past into fragments, then reconnecting them through myth, he found a way, in his words, "of controlling, of ordering, of giving a shape and a significance to the immense panorama of futility and anarchy which is contemporary history" (480). The idea of myth as a unifying structure across eras and cultures came to Eliot from a book that was generating much excitement at the time: The Golden Bough, by anthropologist James Frazer. And the specific myth cluster he took from Frazer to figure a wasted world longing for renewal was the ancient Eastern Mediterranean harvest myth of the dead land thirsting for rain, finally fertilized and restored to life by the blood of a god—usually named Tammuz or Adonis.

the day.(1) Modernist injunctions like Pound's: "Don't chop your stuff into separate iambs. Don't make each line stop dead at the end, and then begin every line with a heave," were well heeded by modern Arabic poets bringing about a revolution in the form of the new poetry. "To use no superfluous word, no adjective which (did) not reveal something," to "go in fear of abstraction," to "use either no ornament or good ornament' were imagist principles that seemed to topple the norms of traditional Arabic poetry.

But it is interesting how such modernist manifestations in modern Arabic poetry were coupled by obvious romantic traits. As Enani remarks: "The new poets wallowed in the imported bleakness, occasionally giving it the form of a romantic wistful melancholy ("Hijazi – Abdul-Saboor Thrust": 177). Romantic nostalgia, melancholy, introspectiveness are dominant traits in Arabic poetry in general which persisted in modern times though the sloppiness of the romantic form of the poem was over and done with. Enani continues:

> *The gloom of the Western poet became an 'attitude', often affected but, strangely enough, sometimes genuinely embraced and transferred to local themes. Gradually, however, the bleakness gave way to poetic sadness of the purely romantic type: the despair gave way to hope, though the attitudinizing persisted. (Enani, "Hijazi–Abdul-Saboor Thrust'": 177)*

It is this combination of the modernist and the romantic that gives the "new" Arabic poetry its distinct flavour. A typical modern Arabic poem revives the memory of a long-absent sweetheart, or the memory of a remote past. Distinctly, "the loneliness of the individual in the heart of the crowd and the fragile nature of modern love" are the dominant themes (Farid, 2001: 82). The poetry is "replete with images of solitude, estrangement and separation from others," and often "speakers admit freely that they do not belong to their surroundings." Love relationships are often "doomed from the very start to failure;" thus following "a long-established tradition of romantic poetry haunted by the gap between the actual and the ideal" (Farid: 82). Thus, while rebelling, often despairingly, against oppressive social and political conditions in a truly

(1) In the Arab world, unlike most modern Western societies, poetry had long been heard as the voice of society's soul. When that voice began to condemn the society's rulers, the poet was bound to be in danger. So, a call for the poet's sacrificial blood to fertilize and renew the land was more than a metaphor. Real blood was being spilled. The ritual death in the Tammuz/Adonis myth was, it seemed, being horribly reenacted in the place of its origin. The barren land was the poet's own country, deprived of life by tyrannical rule. To free the land from death, sacrifice would be necessary, with the poet and the people playing the sacrificial part.

modernist stance, the poets of that generation sought refuge, mostly half-hearted, in the domain of romantic idealism, nostalgia and melancholy:

> *The first modernists who rebelled against the 'strictures' of society as well as of verse, were professedly 'importing' the European modernist tradition and sometimes writing in direct imitation of T.S. Eliot, the arch –modernist. But there again, an undercurrent of romanticism may be perceived in their mature work: sometimes the condemnation of a 'reality' or 'realities' betrayed an aspiration to an ideal condition, a 'hyper-reality' of the kind the postmodernists believe in, but the obsession with the 'thinking subject' — the ego in all its manifestations — as the centre of existence, if not of the universe, revealed an individualism bordering on Kantian solipsism. (Enani, 2000 Intro., Arabic Verse Since 1970: 32).*

The poetry of Salah Abdul-Saboor (1931-1981), Farooq Shoosha, (b. 1936), Muhammad Ibrahim Abu-Sinnah (b. 1937) and Farooq Guwaidah (b. 1945) represents the prime features of the modernist – romantic spirit that characterizes Arabic poetry in the second half of the twentieth century. As noted earlier, sea/ desert imagery is a recurrent phenomenon in their poetry. On the one hand, it is imagery assimilative of the dual geographical locations, existing mostly side by side, that influence the daily perception of the common Arab dweller; the sea and desert existing in such expansive proximity as seldom occurs in other parts of the world. On the other hand, the image is resonant with obvious modernist and romantic connotations that make it more fitting for the mentality of the modern Arab poet. Furthermore, it is important to note that the image often overlaps; the desert often assuming the features of the sea and vice versa because "semiologically," as Enani notes, "the desert is the Arabic equivalent of the sea" (Enani, "Hijazi—Abdul-Saboor Thrust": 182).(1)

But it is interesting how Arabic poetry in general, even that belonging to the pre-Islamic era, often equates desert and sea imagery in remarkable ways. Tarafa, who flourished twenty or twenty five years before the advent of Islam, compares the fleet camel to a big rocking ship in his poem which is one of "The Seven Hanging Odes" (Al-Mu'allaqât):

(1) Observe, for example, Arabic expressions such as "the desert ship" (Safinata'lsahraa') which refers to a camel and "the sand sea" (Bahr Al-Remaal) which refers to a desert region.

> *The litters of the lady of Mâlik tribe, at the time of departure in the morning, looked like ships (Khalâyâsafîn) In Nawâsif, like 'adawli' ships or those of Ibn Yâmin, whom sailors sometimes turn obliquely and sometimes steer in the right course. (Zûzanî, 1907: 30-31; Tr. Jones, 1783: 17)*

Tarafa draws a realistic picture of the waves of the sea breaking against a ship and uses the word hubâb to signify waves and hayzûm to refer to the prow of the ship:

> *The prows of the ship cleave the foaming waves in the same way as children, while playing, cut a heap of clay with their hands and divide it into two parts. (Zûzanî: 1; Jones: 18)*

The poet uses a maritime simile to stress the beauty of his long-necked she-camel:

> *When she raises her long neck, it resembles the stern ship (bûsî) sailing up the billowy Tigris. (Zûzanî: 37; Jones: 21)*

Another example is that of the proud heroic poet, ‘Amr Ibn Kalthûm of the Taghlib tribe of Rabî‘a, when he describes the achievements of his Taghlibs, who incidentally lived exclusively in the desert:

> *We have filled the land until it has become too confined for us, and we have covered the sea with ships. (Zûzanî: 94; Jones: 88).*

Yet, it is obvious that this merging of the desert and sea lacks the modernist- romantic traits that have been noted so far; traits that bear distinct resemblances to the English romantics of the 19th century: Wordsworth, Coleridge, Byron, Shelly and Keats. The influence of those poets on the development of the modernist-adapted romantic poem can hardly be under-estimated.

Sea/desert imagery, for instance; so recurrent in modern Arabic poetry, is a feature of English Romanticism. Wordsworth is a proponent of this image; to cite only one clear example [(1)]. Near the beginning of the fifth book of The Prelude, Wordsworth describes in some detail a dream in which an "Arab of the

(1) W.H. Auden dedicates an entire book, The Enchafèd Flood or The Romantic Iconography of the Sea, composed of three critical essays, for the attempt to understand the nature of Romanticism through an examination of its treatment of a single theme, the sea. Chapter One traces, exclusively the sea/desert image and is entitled: “The Sea and the Desert”.

Bedouin Tribes", mounted on a horse, was carrying "underneath one arm/ a Stone; and, in the opposite hand, a Shell." When asked for the meaning of the two objects, the Bedouin replied that the stone was “Euclid’s Elements” and the shell, held to the poet’s ear, represents, in the latter’s words, "A loud prophetic blast of harmony, / An ode, in passion uttered." The desert tribesman was carrying the two objects in fear of a “deluge now at hand” and speeding ahead in hope that he may bury both before he is over-swept by the destructive water. Hasting forward, he refuses the persona's assistance; his mind bent on saving the two precious objects. But the prospect of his mission seems doomed as “the waters of the deep” gather upon him:

He left me: I call’d after him aloud;

He heeded not; but with his twofold charge

Beneath his arm, before me full in view

I saw him riding o’er the Desert Sands,

With the fleet waters of the drowning world

In chase of him. *Book V. 132 – 137.*

Here, the sea/desert symbol is coupled with that of the stone and shell, creating a duality that requires a constant search for reconciliation. W.H. Auden, in his exquisite analysis of this excerpt, interprets the stone as a symbol of “abstract geometry” and the shell as “imagination or instinct” which "between them offer alternative routes of salvation from the anxiety of the dreamer; a promise which is not realized." (Auden, 1967: 5)

Auden’s further interpretation of the symbolic meaning of the stone and the shell is quite relevant:

> *As symbolic object, the stone is related to the desert, which like the Ancient Mariner’s situation is a becalmed state when the distress is caused by lack of passion, good or bad, and the shell is related to the sea, to powers, that is, which, though preferable to aridity, are nevertheless more dangerous; the shell is a consolation yet what it says is a prophecy of destruction by the weltering flood; and only a sublime soul can ride the storm. (41)*

Indeed, the poet himself is often endangered by his shell, and in the Seventh Book Wordsworth speaks of the value of geometry in the following terms:

Mighty is the charm

Of these abstractions to a mind beset

With images and haunted by itself.

Then, he compares himself to a shipwrecked mariner who passed the time on a desert island drawing diagrams with a stick, escaping from the distress of his corporal situation into:

an independent world

Created out of pure intelligence.

Two antithetical symbolic clusters exist here side by side in search of a reconciliation which is never attained. Instead of acquiring a harmonic proximity with each other, one element, the sea, overwhelms the other, the desert; destroying in its way the heritage of human civilization: science (the stone) and art (the shell). Auden views the sea as "so little of a friendly symbol" in which "a voyage is a necessary evil, a crossing of that which separates or estranges" (Auden: 6-7):

> *Neither Odysseus nor Jason goes to sea for the sake of the voyage; the former is trying to get home and, if it were not for the enmity of Poseidon, the father of the monster Cyclops, it would be soon over, which is what Odysseus most desires; the latter is trying to capture the Golden Fleece, which is in a distant country, to bring back to his own. If it were nearer and no voyage were necessary, he would be much relieved. (Auden: 7-8).*

Similarly, in the Anglo-Saxon poems, "The Wanderer" and "The Sea farer", the mariner is to be pitied rather than admired:

Heart weary

Over ocean streams must for long

Stir with hands frost cold sea

Rove paths of exile.

No protecting kinsman

Can bring comfort to the soul in loneliness.

Full little he thinks who has life's joy

And dwells in cities and has few disasters,

Proud and wine – flushed, how I, weary often,

Must bide my time on the brimming stream.

The putting to sea, from a romantic standpoint therefore, is, for the most part, involuntarily entered upon as a pleasure.

Like the sea, the desert, as Auden notes, is the nucleus of a cluster of traditional associations. It is the place where the water of life is lacking: "the valley of dry bones in Ezekiel's vision"; a place where "nobody desires by nature to be" or where "one chooses to withdraw from the city in order to be alone" for self-examination and purification (e.g., Jesus' forty days in the wilderness and the Thebaid). There are, consequently, obvious resemblances. Both are a wilderness where man is "free from the evils and the responsibilities of communal life" (Auden: 13-15). Thus, Byron writes of the ocean:

Man marks the earth with ruin – his control

Stops with the shore. *(Childe Harold)*

And Captain Nemo, the commander of the submarine Nautilus in Twenty Thousand Leagues under the sea cries:

> *The sea does not belong to despots. Upon its surface men can still exercise unjust laws, fight, tear one another to pieces, and be carried away with terrestrial horrors. But at thirty feet below its level, their reign ceases, their influence is quenched, and their power disappears. Ah, sir; live, live in the bosom of the waters. There only is independence. There I recognize no master's voice. There I am free.*

However, both sea and desert are "lonely places of alienation, and the individual who finds himself there, whether by choice or fate, must from time to

time, rightly or wrongly, be visited by desperate longings for home and company" (Auden: 16). So, Ahab, in Melville's Moby Dick, on that final beautiful day before his encounter with the Great White Whale, softens and calls despairingly to Starbuck:

> *Stand close to me, Starbuk; let me look into a human eye; it is better than to Gaze into sea or sky; better than to gaze upon God. By the green land; by the bright hearthstone! this is the magic glass, man; I see my wife and my child in thine eye…. (317)*

And so too in his moment of greatest anguish when the Ancient Mariner is

> *Alone, alone, all, all, alone*
>
> *Alone on a wide wide sea!*

He looks up nostalgically to the moon, the stars and the blue sky. And when the ship begins to move again, he is refreshed by the sound of the sails, remembering wistfully the romantic, secure setting of the inland:

> *A noise like of a hidden brook*
>
> *In the leafy month of June,*
>
> *That to the sleeping woods all night*
>
> *Singeth a quiet tune.*

But just as there are similarities, there are often palpable differences between the desert and the sea which often pose them as opposites. The desert, for instance, is the place where life has dried up and ended, the Omega of temporal existence. The sea, on the other hand, is the Alpha of existence, the symbol of potentiality. Observe Byron:

> *Thy shores are empires, changed in all save thee-*
>
> *Assyria, Greece, Rome, Carthage, what are they?*
>
> *Thy waters wash'd their power while they were free,*
>
> *And many a tyrant since; their shores obey*
>
> *The stranger, slave, or savage; their decay*

Has dried up realms to deserts: — not so thou; —

Unchangeable, save to thy wild waves' play,

Time notes no wrinkle on thine azure brow:

Such as creation's dawn beheld, thou rollest now.

("Childe Harold," Canto IV)

Its first obvious characteristic is its perpetual motion, the violence of wave as tempest; its power may be destructive, but unlike that of the desert, it is positive. Its second is the teeming life that lies hidden below the surface which, however dreadful, is greater than the visible:

As this appalling ocean surrounds the verdant land, so in the soul of man there lies one insular Tahiti, full of peace and joy, but encompassed by all the horror of the half-known life. (Moby Dick: 211)

As such, "the sea is the symbol of primitive potential power as contrasted with the desert of actualized triviality, of living barbarism versus lifeless decadence" (Auden: 18).

The impact of 19th century European romantic literature with respect to the development of sea/desert imagery can in no way be underestimated when encountering modern Egyptian Arabic Poetry. A modernist perspective is undoubtedly a positive addition in the latter, but it is the merging of the modern and the romantic that gives modern Egyptian Arabic poetry its distinct features. In Salah Abdul-Saboor's "Exodus", for example, the title is suggestive of the flight of the Jews from Egypt; a journey that involves the miraculous crossing of the Red Sea. Yet, the theme of the poem is handled in terms of the flight of prophet Mohammed from Mecca to Medina to avoid oppression. The sea/desert journey is part of Abdul-Saboor's "mythopoeic imagination turn(ing) the historical incident into a highly-charged emotional symbol" (Enani, "Hijazi - Abdul-Saboor Thrust": 180). The "Exodus" is actually that of the persona from himself; thus, precluding the possibility of flight: "None is after me but my old self". As Enani notes, "the theme of departure is essentially romantic" (Hijazi – Abdul-Saboor Thrust": 180); thus, reiterating Auden's remark that a new note marks the romantic attitude in the nineteenth century, namely that "an abiding destination is unknown even if it may exist" (32). Observe Wordsworth:

What dwelling place shall receive me? In what vale

Shall be my harbour? Underneath what Grove

Shall I take up my home, and what sweet stream

Shall with its murmur lull me to rest?

(Prelude, I, 11-14)

The romantic voyage, stereotypically therefore, is to be taken for its own sake. But Abdul-Saboor's slight modification, here, is that "in his forced 'Exodus' from his 'old self' he must be certain of a land of promise ('the promised land'), but in the course of the poem this proves to be merely visionary" (Enani, Hijazi – Abdul-Saboor Thrust": 181):

The pains of my journey

Are my purgatory,

And death in the desert

Perpetual resurrection:

……

Oh, my city of light!

My visionary city

Imbibing light,

My visionary city,

Exuding light

Are you an illusion,

A mirage, taunting a traveler lost?

Or are you real.

The mirage in the desert taunting the "traveler lost" is no longer expressive of the plight of Prophet Mohammed, but of his "old self" escaping a taunting past now projected into a meaningless present:

> *The 'city of light' which now becomes 'visionary' is Medina: It is now transferred to a subjective level, gaining in symbolic value as an unattainable point in time. In other words, it ceases to be a real city and becomes an idea, so that the real theme is now the flight from the past, with the desert as the dominant image. (Enani, Hijazi — Abdul- Saboor Trust: 181 – 82)*

The aimless romantic journey continues in "Verse and Ashes, or the Manila Wisdom", still replete with emotional and symbolic undertones:

Oh, you've come back at last, my lost voice!

For long have wandered in deserts of silence!

A lost shadow in nights of dark moons, my verse!

How fared you in the quotidian prose of nameless

Days— unnamed, unnamable!

The nomad, this time, is the poet's poetic voice lost for long in the "deserts of silence". Whether a decline in poetic inspiration or a temporary lack of poetic interest, the "lost voice" has finally made its way home after assuming a "Will O' the Wisp" fleeting feature; roaming symbolic romantic deserts: "A lost shadow in nights of dark moons." As poetic inspiration is restored, replacing "the quotidian prose of nameless days," the poet is struck by a flood of imagery, "coming and going, radiant and fading," signaling a resurrection of his poetic powers:

Floating oftentimes in the foam

Of distant horizons, sinking,

Or breaking as a wave, waning, dissolving,

Then drying up as morning dew–

But it is a resurrection that sounds only too precarious. The water imagery is uncompromising. Compared to a dilapidated boat, the imagery initially "floats", before "Sinking/ Or breaking as a wave." Reaching its ultimate destination, it "dissolve(es)" before "drying up" like the "morning dew". Once again, he finds himself back to his "lost voice" in the "deserts of silence". The

water has proved too salty to drink; even too stormy to provide a safe haven. So, he is back once more as a nomad roaming the deserts for inspiration. The poem has come full circle with the sea and desert used as equivalents; one eventually leading to the other in an incessant vortex.

In "Fragments of a Common Sad Tale ….", the journey is undertaken by a persona who assumes a double role: "mystic" and "fisherman" in the "deserts of years". Here, the sea/desert imagery sequentially overlaps. The focus of attraction is a woman, pretty as a mermaid:

As a candle erect and nude she stood,

The light flooding from her parting,

Her tresses down like molten gold.

Here, the mystery can only be interpreted by a "mystic" of the desert(1) who possesses the wisdom to "unfold" some "word untold" or by a "fisherman" who finds a talisman on the shore "carried by waves of night uncalled!"

It is interesting how Abdul-Saboor Gradually unites the mystic; a hermit of the desert and the fisherman; a wanderer of the sea, in the quest to solve the mysterious identity of the beautiful woman:

The fairy of fantasy fair

Threw down to him her plaits of hair!

He climbed up, thereupon,

Away from the heat so scorching,

To a tower quaint, so high up in air,

And there, his thirst quenching.

……..

When morning rose

(1) In The Enchafèd Flood, Auden associates the desert with hermits and mystics:
This withdrawal (to the desert) may be temporary, a period of self-examination and purification in order to return to the city with a true knowledge of one's mission and the strength to carry it out (e.g. Jesus' forty days in the wilderness), or it may be permanent, a final rejection of the wicked city of this world, a dying to the life of the flesh and an assumption of a life devoted wholly to spiritual contemplation and prayer (e.g. the Thebaid) …. It is the place where there are no beautiful bodies or comfortable beds or stimulating food and drink or admiration. The temptations of the desert are therefore either sexual mirages raised by the devil to make the hermit nostalgic for his old life or the more subtle temptations of pride when the devil appears in his own form. (13-14).

She wanted him to choose

Between a burning sun, and shade so cool.

This is undoubtedly the mystic of the desert escaping the scorching heat of the sun and quenching his thirst in the "fairy's" tower. It is possibly an enticing mirage drawing him away from his contemplative life. Auden speaks of such occurrences as "sexual mirages raised by the devil to make the hermit nostalgic for his old life (14). Abdul-Saboor certainly seems to opt for the mirage image. The mystic exclaims:

In the desert of time I feel your presence,

On the rocks of silence I hear your footsteps,

A thrill comes over me.

Then, with little hesitation, Abdul-Saboor switches the mystic of the desert to the fisherman of the sea. The latter, too, seems to have fallen under the spell of the mirage; this time what may be called a sea mirage. The quest to unfold the mystery of the woman seems endless:

In your locks I hear the rhythm of words,

In your words I taste vicarious kisses,

In your kisses I stretch over the waves

In the heart of the flood

Washed by radiant foam

By bangles of flowers bangled,

By locks of your hair strangled!

As the mirage engulfs the fisherman, himself equivalently identified as the mystic of the desert, the experience is proving to be quite perilous. The sudden switch from desert to sea equates the two "landscapes" as inhospitable regions(1) and, as such, equates the mystic and the fisherman in their plight.

(1) Auden's elaboration on the inhospitable nature of the sea and desert is worth noting:
The sea, in fact, is that state of barbaric vagueness and disorder out of which civilization has emerged and into which, unless saved by the efforts of gods and men, it is always liable to relapse. (5-6)
Like the sea, the desert is the nucleus of a cluster of traditional associations. It is the place where the water of life is lacking, the valley of dry bones in Ezekiel's vision. It may be so by nature, i.e., the wilderness which lies outside the fertile place or city. As such it is the place where nobody desires by nature to be. Either one is compelled by others to go there because one is a criminal outlaw or a scapegoat (e.g., Cain, Ishmael), or one chooses to withdraw from the city in order to be alone. (13)

The mystic-fisherman persona now wakes to the bitter truth that his/their experience(s) with this elusive woman was a mere mirage; a hallucination engendered by emotional cravings:

I had been a traveler in the desert of years

With heavy steps and a face grim,

When suddenly you crossed my path,

Lunacy dim!

Never were you once in anticipation,

Never is the symbols of my dreams,

Wakeful or asleep,

The birds never whispered your name,

Though long I have listened to them,

The clouds n'er figured your shape

Though long I have looked at them!

The conventional romantic note with which the poem ends is heightened by a sustained set of sea/desert imagery. It is true that the imagery functions on a romantically symbolic and emotional level, but it is also true that the pseudo sea/desert atmosphere of the poem is so vividly portrayed that the reader sympathizes for a persona who virtually feels the heat of the desert scorching his back and the water of the sea stifling his breath.

The modernist-romantic impulse of Abdul-Saboor was soon built upon by the Neo-Romanticism of the trio: Farooq Shoosha, Muhammad Ibrahim Abu-Sinnah and Farooq Guwaidah. Among them, the shape of Modern Arabic poetry acquired new dimensions:

> *They are grouped together, for all their individual differences, because they share the same poetic faith–a basic hope in man's ability to overcome his predicament through the recognition of truth, the power of feeling and the belief in the past; and I have called it Neo-romanticism because the movement represents a revival of the European romantic spirit*

> *which had informed the work of the Apollo Group in the 1930s – Ali Mahmoud Taha, Ibrahim Nagui and Abu-Shadi. (Enani, 1994 "New Romantics": 207)*

Their vision centers on a deep romantic trust of human nature which is capable of regeneration through feeling.

Farooq Shoosha's abstract poetry, often focusing on generalization of universal truths, is modernist in idiom and structure, but profoundly romantic in substance:

> *Behind the melodies of the words, which may be attributed to the Arabic tradition he has so thoroughly absorbed, lies a modernist vision which is all his own, and which paradoxically, seems vitally opposed to our tradition. It is the vision of a revolutionary who does not, cannot, accept the moral squalor of today's world – a rebel armed with faith in the human heart, in the power of feeling, and the consciousness of belonging in a spiritual reality higher than any of the manifestations of daily trafficking could ever allow. (Enani, 2001 "Farooq Shoosha'sTime to Catch time":17)*

This is the reason, Enani remark, Shoosha'sfavourite persona is "a man disgusted by social ills and the road humanity has taken of late to the point of rejecting the entire modern age". ("Neo–Romantics": 208).

The persona often finds solace in nostalgic dreams in which sea/desert imagery overlap from one stanza to another revealing an array of escapist emotions. In part VII of "A Poetess in Love: An Elegy", he meditates:

> *Oh, I dream of remote islands,*
>
> *Of an oak with branches intertwined*
>
> *Horizon bound,*
>
> *With lovers' names on the trunk inscribed!*
>
> *I dream of a beach*
>
> *Where the strand still bears*

The footprints of a couple merged into one.

The weight of oppressive reality finds an outlet in a Robinson Crusoe-like Island surrounded by a beach which bears the print of a long-forgotten romantic love. It is interesting how the sea image is instantly coupled by its desert counterpart:

I dream of sands, of deserts, …

Of grand oriental cities

Grown into fantasy, into magical casements.

The sands of the desert are no less romantic for Shoosha, comprising, along with "oriental cities", a means of escape into fantasies and "magical casements." Then, sea imagery immediately returns ever so persistent:

I dream of a bird, a seagull,

An Albatross, voyaging through seas uncharted,

Carried by the waves unwearied.

The typical Shelly dream is obvious here, yet circular in movement as is typical of Shoosha's poetry.From "remote islands" to "deserts" to "voyaging through seas uncharted", the persona is apparently on an aimless quest quite similar to that of Abdul-Saboor's. Thus, the poem ends in the typical circular manner: "I dream of going back to an age gone away, / I dream of remote islands."

"A Face that Grants Me Forgiveness" continues Shoosha's sea/desert dialectic, if one might say. Written largely through an internal monologue, the poem is given in terms of "the typical religious experience of confession leading to forgiveness" (Enani, 2001 "Shoosha'sAn Ebony Face": 29). Desert imagery is instantly at the forefront of a moment retrieved from the past:

An overcast horizon gave no hope

Of the least glimmer of light

Or a single dew drop

To quench the thirst of the heart

And the parched desert of a life-time.

A thirsty heart and a desolate life-time reflect a somber state of mind confirming a series of negatives: “no hope, no promise, no spring.” The expected and complementary sea image sets itself poignantly at the end of the stanza:

A blocked horizon,

Pregnant dejections,

And times foundering on times!

The use of the sea-image: “times foundering on times” as opposed to the previously sparse desert imagery is careful, studied, if not deliberate. "The absence of water (‘parched’)," as Enani notes, "leads to sinking (and perhaps death) in water." It is a paradoxical situation in which sea and desert assume opposite roles.

The internal monologue verges on a point of outburst when the persona ponders his frustrated state of mind through a succession of dizzying sea images posed as a rhetorical question:

Can there be any madness greater

Than to throw oneself into the sea,

To delude the irate waves

Mounting with the breath to surge,

To ride the storm of rage,

And push the boat into the deluge?

This is the reality the inner voice of the persona is demanding him to face. Pushing “the boat into the deluge” is madness; indeed, but a necessary act to shatter the illusion of reconciliation:

> *The old paradise is destroyed, and the images of distortion and confusion take over. The earlier ‘well’ now throws up a corpse, the drums wail, and the trees have broken twigs. The scene of devastation, in the present, includes an active volcano, now clearly standing for the irruption of mysterious forces within the soul – and the situation becomes incomprehensible (Enani, "Farooq Shoosha’sAn Ebony Face": 32)*

Yet, the more incomprehensible the situation becomes, the nearer to resolution the entire experience is moving towards. As expected, it is romantic love that suddenly intervenes to salvage the persona's inner being from imminent loss:

None else but you

Can now control my sails.

The tempestuous sea now calms turning to a tranquil river because of her love. The parched desert is no longer arid because of her presence and the persona's thirst is finally quenched:

You're the bell whose rhythm, singing,

As a quiet river yet rushing!

Your breezes cool me down,

All thirst quenching!

Once again, water and desert imagery is associated with the romantic resolution of the persona's inner conflict. Interesting also is the implication in the poem of a journey, internal of course, that eventually concludes in the save haven of romantic love. Shoosha in consequence, is faithful to Abdul-Saboor in this respect; building systematically on the motif of the romantic journey that reaches fulfillment in love.

Muhammad Ibrahim Abu-Sinnah, together with Shoosha, is a true representative of the second wave of "The New Verse in Egypt" movement; the first being pioneered, of course, by Salah Abdul-Saboor. Author of the stately romantic poem, Abu-Sinnah believes, like Shoosha, in the original goodness of man:

> *In poem after poem of the mature Abu-Sinnah, this hope produces images of man battling against ills that are irremediable: love emerges as the master passion, and seems to hold the key to salvation. (Enani, "Neo-Romantics": 213)*

He is a poet who conjures the countryside of his childhood but is also the self-imposed exile of the city living in a maze of iron, bricks and concrete. He relies on the power of imagination to deflate his urban reality and celebrate his past rural childhood. The persistent tug between the romantic and the realistic is characteristic of his poetry:

> *He knows how to describe a state of mind in terms of landscape. A vein of nostalgia for a simpler mode of life runs through his work. His country-bred men and women seem never to have shaken off the nightmare of the encounter with the city. A single-minded pursuit of innocence; an ability to conjure up a lost childhood, and a dominant concern with the values of justice, love and freedom are the hallmarks of his mind…. Not infrequently, the city looms as ominous background behind his rural landscapes. In putting across his own interpretation of the urban/rural antithesis, he provides an adequate buttressing of the theory that a romantic poet is not necessarily unaware of the political, social and economic forces at work in his society – Abu-Sinnah is a poet whose merger of the realistic with the romantic is his most enduring achievement. (Farid, 1993 Intro., Muhammad Abu-Sinnah: Poems: 10)*

As noted earlier, love forms a central inspiration for Abu-Sinnah, yet it is love firmly attached to the affairs of the world. In his autobiographical treatise, "My Road to Poetry", Abu-Sinnah stresses the importance of love as a vehement human passion by equating it with the act of poetic creation:

> *To me, poetry is like love. Both are an intimate attempt to embrace the world; two rivers of overflowing feelings and unbound emotions. Both are a too human expression of the necessity of beauty. They grow and die in the heart of human will and beyond it. (Abu-Sinnah, 1993: 119)*

His language, therefore, is "couched in the romantic idiom of the school of Apollo (and) although his poetry may occasionally be tainted with a florid exuberance, his language could be simple to the point of homeliness" (Farid, Intro., Muhammad Abu-Sinnah:13).

Like his contemporaries, Abu-Sinnah often resorts to sea/desert imagery to augment his point of view. In "Journal of Bed-ridden Leila", for example, his romantic dream of conjuring an elusive love from the past is thwarted by the

harsh present reality of war and bloodshed. The dream is elaborate and well-prepared for. His dream lady deserves all the majesty of a Bedouin princess:

I once had a dream.

Your bold face had come from afar,

I decked my chamber

With a rose, a cloud and a star,

I sprinkled two drops of Nile waters,

A whole wave from Barada,

I knew how much you loved water,

Coming from afar.[(1)]

Nile water is traditionally sacred and for a woman "coming from afar;" from the depth of the desert or from a remote island in the sea, she would certainly be appreciative of the courtesy. Fresh water being priceless for nomads and seamen alike, there is also the implication that the persona, himself conscious of the value of water, is willing to squander the few drops of Nile water necessary for his sustenance as a loving gesture of welcome to his dream lady.

But his dream of reunion with this elusive woman from the past, typically words worthian in features, is thwarted by a reality too harsh to accommodate such a fantasy:

I sang, and washed and wanted you,

But in the morning

Only the invaders arrived,

Armed with hate,

Masked with tyranny.

The implicit reference, here, is to the 1967 war with Israel ending in defeat and shattering the dream of the entire Arab nation. The political reference does not seem to conform with the romantic, somewhat overtly sentimental

(1) For the translated verse of Muhammad Abu-Sinnah, I have relied on Soad Mahmoud Naguib's translation of selections of Abu-Sinnah's poetry: Muhammad Abu-Sinnah: Poems. Cairo: General Egyptian Book Organization, 1993 with Introduction and Appendices by Maher Shafiq Farid.

atmosphere of the poem. But as noted earlier, reality, political in many cases, often intervenes to thwart romantic dreams and the 1967 defeat from Israel was a hallmark that triggered a sense of disillusionment:

> *Written in the shadow of the 1967 debacle, his poetry of the late sixties is shot through with a sense of loss and disillusionment. This poetry of social commentary or urban observation is rooted in the experience of the six-day war. He did a thorough vituperative job of castigating a hollow and corrupt regime. (Farid, Intro., Muhammad Abu-Sinnah: Poems:12)*

The intrusion of reality proves too straining for his romantic dream to reach fulfillment. "Swords/ Flung over my head, / The thorns at my feet, / And fire in the palm trees, …/ (have) swallowed up/ My lantern light." The persona loses emotional contact with her, and she recedes into her desert landscape:

Wither roamest thou, I sing,

Wither art thou?

In the desert turning the stones

In search of a word from heaven?

Or possibly she voyages river and sea in the attempt to signal a message to the invaders that it is love and life, not their oppression, that ultimately triumph:

Perhaps you're crossing one river after another

Riding one sea into another

In search of my medicine

Beyond the farthest coast!

Perhaps you're at Suez and the Golan,

Waiting for the fire to tell the invaders

That love and life always triumphed.

Here, romance and politics clash and Abu-Sinnah, conscious that harsh reality often thwarts romantic dreams, endeavours to prove the opposite. It is his incarnated romantic love that attempts to foil the fact that Israeli military occupation of the Egyptian Suez Canal and the Syrian Golan Heights is only temporary and that love and life, the two liberating forces, must eventually triumph. Both land and beloved will in the end be reclaimed. The poem ends on an optimistic note and the sea/desert imagery has played the dual function of romantic and realistic reconciliation. Though the beloved is imaginatively lost in both desert and sea, yet there remains the emotional compensation that she represents, to the invaders of the land, a potent symbol of imminent liberation. The romantic quest, this time, has been intertwined with the political pursuit for liberation and this is possibly Abu-Sinnah's true contribution to the Neo-Romantic Movement of Arab poetry.

Optimistic reconciliation is not, however, a dominant note in Abu-Sinnah's poetry. It is often substituted, as in "The Sorrow of a Cloud Unwilling to Rain" by disillusion and grief. The poem opens with an illusion of optimism that amounts to sappy smugness:

In my wings

I was hiding a river green,

Music seeped within;

I was hiding a sky

Azure and serene,

The sun of love and apple trees

Sighing gently in the breeze.

It is at this moment that Abu-Sinnah resorts to sea/desert imagery to give vent to this sense of political betrayal; of the lies that sent a nation to inevitable military and cultural defeat. He begins by a set of sea imagery that reveal the shattering of the dream:

Ships are wrecked in the harbour,

Islands flee in the sea

Then they are overturned by waves.

Black wind sinks

In abysmal depths,

Choking to death defeated truths;

Lies inevitably beget lies.

The "breeze" of self-complacency in the beginning of the poem has turned into the "black wind" of harsh reality, of political lies and eventual military defeat. The "wrecking", "overturning" and "sinking" in "abysmal depths" are all too expressive of a disillusioned people who were a prey to the lies and deceit of their leaders. The persona comes to realize that he dwells in "cities of cruelty and delusions!" where "trees withered" and "rivers evaporate/ Into illusions." The poem concludes with an image of the desert draining all hope or at least what's left of it:

A desert is chasing me;

I'm feeling great sorrow,

On sand, I do wallow

In the throes of death,

Love is at your borders,

Water dries out

In my turns

I turn round in fear

In the desert.

The glimmer of love at the borders is too elusive; too distant to be incarnated either as an individual or collective emotion. On the desert sand, there is only the harsh reality of death; the successive wars with Israel being located, for the most part, in the deserts of Sinai. When the persona revives from the harsh experience of war and defeat, there is no longer a "river green" nor a "sky/ Azure and serene"; nor even "apple trees/ Sighing gently in the breeze." Instead, he "turn(s) round in fear / In the desert" of a new reality that has shattered the old illusion.

The merging of the political and the romantic in Abu-Sinnah's poetry does not preclude the fact that he was an advocate, like his contemporaries, of the romantic journey that pursues an ever-elusive love. The persona is constantly willing to sail by night and roam the desert by day to fulfill his dream of union

with his beloved. "Sailing in the Heart" is a poem that moves towards that fulfillment:

So reprimand me not

For I'm sailing in the heart

By night to where

You are.

And when dawn breaks

I traverse these deserts

To where you shine,

Under the sky

Of the Mukkattem

And the Nile,

Of the great Pyramid.

As typical, the sea/desert journey is metaphorical in essence; implicit of a longing not to locate the beloved, but to savour the emotional nostalgia of the romantic quest. It is the endless journey that really matters which, if ending in romantic fulfillment, would shatter the entire dream altogether.

The poetry of Muhammad Abu-Sinnah, unlike his near contemporaries, has often been attacked for lapsing back into stock responses and romantic sloppiness; of a narrow purpose when it comes to grappling with reality:

> *His work is damaged by large tracts of the sentimental or, alternately, of the didactic. An excessive concern with the simple passions of the human heart has, so the argument runs, rendered him into a neo-romantic who failed to carry on the tradition of the 'realist'. (Farid, Intro., Muhammad Abu-Sinnah: Poems: 14)*

This is true to a certain extent, yet he remains a hallmark in the modern Neo-Romantic movement; a pioneer in upholding and reviving the romantic dream against the harsh blows of reality:

> *Never were ulterior considerations allowed to deflect him from his purpose. There is body and richness in his work, a moral revulsion from all forms of baseness, and a whole range of attitudes remarkable for its basic decency. (Farid, Intro., Muhammad Abu-Sinnah: Poems: 14).*

Farooq Guwaidah, the fourth representative of the Neo-Romantic Arab movement in Egypt, is often described as the Shelly of the Arab world. His inclination towards self-expression and reluctance of profound intellectual constructs has leveled against him the criticism that he runs against the cynical and frivolous spirit of the age:

> *He is described as today's Arab world 'romantic' poet par Excellence, as he has been swimming against the tide of 'Arabs modernism' (and post-modernism) and vindicating the cult of feeling and plain language that has won him the hearts of millions. He alone has resisted the temptations of vagueness, pedantry, pretentiousness and preciosity, never departing from the genuine rhythms of Arabic verse in the name of innovation – a trap into which many (if not most) poets of the rising generation have fallen. (Enani, 1997 Intro, A Thousand Faces Has the Moon:5)*

Guwaidah seems to depart from an immersion into the modernist values, as regards the purpose and function of modern poetry, which many of his contemporaries seem to relish. Yet, he remains, despite the protestations of many, an epitome of the spirit of age:

> *Of all poets writing today, Guwaidah may be said to be the only poet who writes in modern standard Arabic (MSA) maintaining both rhythm and rhyme, whilst rebelling against the present situation that seems to force itself on everybody's consciousness in this age of globalization–with its post-modernistic undercurrents (the absence of any universally valid standards of truth, the relativity of all values, if any, and so on) and with its express modernistic essence (cynicism,*

> *apathy, indifference, the quest for the exotic, the passion for the odd-the queer and unnatural, and experimentation with form for the sake of novelty). But if rebellion be the hallmark of Guwaidah, how can he be described as the epitome of the spirit of the age that seems to combine these two 'negative' trends? (Enani, Intro., Had We Not Parted 8)*

Enani's response is apt enough:

> *He draws on resources peculiar to the human psyche (memory, passion, love, compassion etc) to reveal man's equally intrinsic failings (love of power, self-love, tendency to injustice and so on). By painting an apparently ambivalent picture of man - hence his love- hate relationship with the critics and with many of his readers - he comes close enough to hitting a truth that few people find palatable. (Enani, 1999 Intro., Had We Not Parted: 9)*

In short, Guwaidah is neither a Wordsworth who could escape to "nature" nor an Eliot or a Larkin fragmenting the values of his culture. He is simply involved which accounts largely for the ambivalence.

Love and the past are basic constituents in Guwaidah's poetry, but both are inseparable from the present and hardly does the reader detect the presentation of present realities in other than temporal terms. But this is only a point of departure:

> *To be conscious of belonging in time is only a starting point in Guwaidah's 'poetic system': as in all such systems, a vision is evolved from the apparently disparate images which may combine in thematic or in 'axial' lines, or work as 'leitmotifs' almost subliminally. A thematic line is suggested by the images of 'departure' – or separation. A whole group will be formed that deal with the journey (and its variations, such as homecoming, reunion, or, on the other hand, estrangement, or alienation). (Enani, Intro., Had We Not Parted: 14)*

The sea/desert imagery in Guwaidah's poetry is often used as an archetype with ambivalent implications. "To the usual function, as the means of separation or reunion," Enani continues, "is added the deep-level significance of the element of life and death" (Intro., Had we Not Parted: 15). In "A Song for the Homeland", the Nile, a potent image for the sustenance of life in Egypt, is a homeless vagabond tottering lifeless in search of a home:

In the wastes of bastard times

The Nile totters along,

On two disabled feet, broken,

Looks around in boredom

In search of a home,

Wandering, in his dire straits,

'Which one of us has changed—

'The face of the land, or the face of the times?'

Guwaidah, here, exposes the sterility of a land that has now turned into "wastes" despite being penetrated by an archetypal source of fertility: the Nile. The Nile itself, once overwhelming as a source of life for the land, is now crippled unable to perform his age-old role as provider for the people of his land. It is certainly an ambivalence that exposes a "sense of alienation and the feeling that the life- giving force is astray" (Enani, Intro., A Thousand Faces Has the Moon: 28).

A series of images expressive of a "stifled" life then follow. On the banks of the Nile, "sunlight is dying"; "trees (are) engaged in slaughter"; "the morning light is stifled"; "the moon face has been torn asunder" and "the sound of rain is smothered." Absence of life-giving forces is the consequence of a parched land that is no longer given to fertility:

> *There is life here, but it is repressed: the implication is that there are forces behind this state of affairs which are left undefined. The Arabic supplies a subject for these forces – 'they', though who 'they' might be is left to the reader to infer (Enani, Intro., A Thousand Faces has the Moon:30 – 31).*

Guwaidah ends the poem by a lamentation for the victimized river laying the blame on a vile, oppressive age:

Dear royal river

I have long been a courtier,

But my resignation

Now I tender!

No longer can I sing

In jails of oppression

And endless night!

No longer can I play

A caged nightingale,

Or a vanquished knight

Seeking an impossible dream?

The dream of reclaiming the past is repeatedly thwarted by a relentless present and the poet's supplications seem to dissipate in a meaningless void:

O river majestical

If you once again could flow

As king, towering high,

You will be the Nile I know,

Possessing my eye!

This is indeed a half-hearted prayer that is likely to end in alienation and separation rather than reunion. The life-denying forces seem to be gaining momentum in the face of fragile and wishful supplications. The image of the Nile has been successfully manipulated by Guwaidah as an archetypal life-giving symbol that serves the reverse function of a victimized life-denying force; an ambivalence once again highly characteristic of Guwaidah's poetry.

The Nile River is once more the witness of life-denying forces in "Even the Stones Are Rebellious" in which Guwaidah's ambivalence is displayed

through a "technique of metamorphosis to establish the relationship between the solid and the fluid, the static and dynamic, the inanimate and the living, in the man-stone relationship" (Enani, Intro., Had We Not Parted: 16-17). Guwaidah's note to the poem reads: "While demolition workers were pulling down Abul-Alaa Bridge, the demolition machines suddenly stopped turning, unable to crush a huge boulder– in the middle of the Nile. It is said they heard it groan at night." The granite rock, used as pier on which the ancient bridge was constructed, resists the forces of change:

An old stone on the breast of the Nile

Is 'crying in the wilderness'!

Fighting grief on the bank of the river,

He suddenly weeps!

He turns round in horror

Conveying his anguish to the water,

But struck by the wind of desolation,

He bends down, moaning in pain.

The poet's emotional personification of the rock makes it the legitimate child of the river resisting separation from its mother by the forces of change; symbolic in this context of life-denying forces. The rock's last few hours of resistance bring it intimately closer to its river mother:

He gets a little closer

To the river water;

Touching it, he sees his wistfulness

therein flowing!

The poor thing staggers,

Torn between fear and stress.

It is paradoxically interesting how Guwaidah transforms a granite boulder, carried from the south desert of Aswan, into a child of the ever-flowing waters of the Nile, thus merging the desert and river water of Egypt into an intricate relationship that defies external man-made forces.

But eventually, the rock succumbs to the inevitable. It (He) is crushed under the axes of demolition workers while its (his) mother (the river) looks on in despair smothering a scream of anguish:

But now the sound of axes was heard

As they the stern stone split!

He soon fell down into the silt

With blood from the eyes spilt

Still screaming as the axes fell,

But the Nile could a mute scream quell!

The poem, however, does not end on such a somber note. The rock/river image is too ambitious to end here. Guwaidah merges the bits and pieces of the rock into the ever-flowing river: "From love inordinate/ He (the rock) vanished into it (the river)." Mortality is being combated by immortality and life, in due course, triumphs over death:

> *The stone merges into the water, becomes part of the Nile, and acquires a movement that belies its apparent stillness. In other words, it gains another life, even physically, even if seen at the literal level to go into the earth as silt, to feed the newly sprouting plants. As part of the Nile, it shares the symbolism of 'the imagination' as powerful movement, used by Wordsworth in The Prelude "As the overflowing Nile fertilizing the whole Egyptian plain." (Enani, Intro., Had We Not parted: 18).*

The poem ends on an optimistic note in which the alienated Nile, and with it an entire culture, is revived in a triumphant resurrection:

Everything in the deep recesses of being

Tells me that tomorrow is the time of morning

The time when the Nile dawn

Will rise again!

In the typical Neo-Romantic mode, Guwaidah draws on the failings of human experience only to find reconciliation in love. In "Swimming Still in Your

Eyes", the persona is repeatedly subdued by a reality which is too blatant for his delicate sensibility. Characteristically, sea/desert imagery assumes the core of the poetic experience:

Drawn are we then by the tidal

Wave of the impossible,

Only to realize how the vision

Has been a mirage, unattainable.

The "tidal wave" image is soon dissipated by what turns out to be a "mirage". The involvement of the sea and the desert in the poetry of Guwaidah, as in the poetry of his contemporaries, is one of both conflict and harmony depending on the emotional experience of the persona. In this poem, the emotional disturbance of the persona's love breeds a conflicting sea/desert imagery expressive of an unfulfilled relationship:

The eyes, now drained,

Were dry river-beds cracked,

Branches that, crying, bled,

And streams nursing the palm trees with sorrow;

The faces were damaged sails,

Comforting one another,

And shores crying over

The ruins of our river.

The "dry river-beds", the "damaged sails" and the "shores crying" are all expressive of a sea metaphorically drying and turning into a desert symbolic of a love that gradually dissipates; failing to concretize or reach fulfillment. The overlapping of the sea/desert imagery reaches a point of ambivalence.

By the end of the poem, the love experience shatters beyond redemption which necessitates the pre-dominance of drowning sea imagery to accommodate the end of a relationship:

Has the world floundered in the deep,

Lured by the promise of an impossible dream?

Barely two steps separate us

But sorrow looms

And 'tis a thousand – mile abyss.

The poignancy of the sea imagery: "floundered", "thousand-mile abyss" are fittingly expressive of the inability to attain the "impossible dream" of love.

The Neo-Romantic movement of modern Arabic poetry in Egypt explores man's quest to come to terms with an ever-changing reality. Recourse to past memories, elusive dreams and unfulfilled love are means to combat this uncompromising reality, but they are means often thwarted by forces personas are either unwilling or unable to resist. The development of sea/desert imagery, sometimes archetypal, sometimes metaphorical, is a basic constituent of this movement's poetry. Abdul Saboor's mysterious romantic journeys to recapture past memories or elusive dreams; Shoosha's escapist personas in search of reconciliation with a harsh reality or romantic love; Abu-Sinnah'swistful aspirations often thwarted by political reality; and Guwaidah's life-giving and life-denying ambivalent forces are all largely reliant as themes, more or less, on sea/desert imagery. Forming a cultural component for the mentality of these modern Arab poets, the sea and desert play a pivotal role in the intellectual and imaginative construct of their poetry resulting in an experience, indeed, both enriched by the endeavour and enriching by the accomplishment.

Works Cited

1. Abu-Sinnah, Muhammad Ibrahim. “My Road to Poetry.” Trans. Maher Shafiq Farid in Muhammad Abu-Sinnah: Poems. Appendix B. Cairo: General Egyptian Book Organization, 1993. 119-136.
2. Auden, W. H.The Enchafèd Flood or The Romantic Iconography of the Sea. New York: Vintage Books, 1967.
3. Eliot, T.S. “Ulysses, Order and Myth.” The Dial (November, 1923). 480 – 83.
4. Enani, M. M. "Farooq Shoosha’sTime to Catch Time." The Comparative Impulse: Essays on Modern Literature ed. M. M. M. Enani. Cairo: State publishing House (GEBO), 2001. 17-23.
5. ----------. “Farooq Shoosha’sAn Ebony Face.” The Contemporary Impulse: Essays on Modern Literature ed. M. M. M. Enani. Cairo: State Publishing House (GEBO), 2001. 25 – 37.
6. ----------. "The Hijazi – Abdul-Saboor Thrust: An Arabic ‘Movement’ is Born." Prefaces to Contemporary Arabic Literature in the Post-Mahfouz Era. Cairo: State Publishing House (GEBO), 1994. 173 – 197.
7. ----------. Introduction. A Thousand Faces Has the Moon by Farooq Guwaidah. Cairo: Egyptian State Publishing House (GEBO), 1997. 5-35
8. ----------. Introduction. Beauty Bathing in the River: Poems. by Farooq Shoosha. Cairo: Egyptian State Publishing House (GEBO), 2003. 7 – 21.
9. ----------. Introduction. Modernist and post-Modernist Arabic Verse Since1970. Cairo: General Egyptian Book Organization Press (GEBO), 2000. 5-43.
10. ----------. Introduction. The Language of Lovers’ Blood. by Farooq Shoosha. Cairo: General Egyptian Book Organization Press (GEBO), 1990. 9 – 23.
11. ----------. "Neo-Romantics: Abu-Sinnah, Shoosha and Guwaidah." Prefaces to contemporary Arabic Literature in the Post-Mahfouz Era. Cairo: State Publishing Mouse (GEBO), 1994. 207 – 216.
12. ----------. Introduction. Had We Not Parted by Farooq Guwaidah. Cairo: Egyptian State Publishing House (GEBO), 1999. 7-19

13. Farid, Maher Shafiq. “Introduction to Selected Poems from Abdul-Aziz Sharaf.” The Comparative Impulse: Essays on Modern Literature. Cairo: State Publishing House (GEBO), 2001.

14. ----------. Introduction. Muhammad Abu-Sinnah: Poems. Select. and Trans. Soad Mahmoud Naguib. Cairo: General Egyptian Book Organization, 1993. 9 – 18.

15. Jabra, Jabra Ibrahim. “Modern Arabic Literature and the West.” Journal of Arabic Literature. Vol. 2 (1971). 76 – 91.

16. Jones, W.The Moallakât or Seven Arabian Poems— with a Translation and Arguments. London, 1783.

17. Melville, Herman.Moby Dick; or, The Whale. New York: Harper 8 Brothers, 1851.

18. Rothenthal, Peggy. “Christ in the Desert of Twentieth-Century Poetry.” Cross Currents. Vol. 47, Issue. 1 (Spring, 1997). 17- 29.

19. Simawe, Saadi A. "Modernism and Metaphor in Contemporary Arabic Poetry." World Literature Today. Vol. 75, Issue 2 (Spring, 2001), 8- 29.

20. Wordsworth, Jonathan, M. M. Abrams and Stephen Gill (ed.) The Prelude: 1799, 1805, 1850. New York: Norton, 1971.

21. Zûzanî, M. Sharh Al-Mu‘allaqât Al – Sab’. Cairo, 1907.